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Institutional Engagement with Students in UK Private Higher Education Providers

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Institutional Engagement with Students in UK Private Higher Education Providers

Gwen van der Velden

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

University of Bath

School of Management

February 2016

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

1	Introduction	
1.1	Context of the study.....	6
1.2	Aims of the research study and research questions.....	9
1.3	Structure of the thesis.....	10
2	Literature review and research context: student engagement	
2.1	Institutional and student engagement in the literature.....	13
2.2	UK and Australian research and relevance to the thesis research question.....	14
2.3	Student engagement in the UK: policy drivers	21
2.4	Private Institutions in the UK and global context	23
2.5	Typologies of private institutions.....	24
2.6	Levelling the playing field - public policy and private institutions.	28
2.7	Institutional Engagement with students in a private context	31
3	Research design, methods and considerations	
3.1	Ontology and Epistemology	34
3.2	Research design.....	35
3.3	Selection of research subjects	39
3.4	Use of interviews	42
3.5	Data construction.....	44
3.6	Analysis in a Critical Realism epistemology	47
3.7	Ethical and validity considerations	49
4	Analysis and Findings by institution	
4.1	Institution A –findings.....	53
4.2	Institution B – findings.....	62
4.3	Institution C – findings	68
4.4	Institution D – findings	72

4.5	Institution E – findings.....	80
5	Analysis and discussion	
5.1	Methods of institutional engagement with students.....	88
5.2	Cross institutional explanations for the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students	98
5.3	Institutional engagement with students in alternative providers in the context of policy	113
6	Conclusion	
6.1	Research findings.....	117
6.2	Reflections on the research	120
	References	
	Appendix 1 - Interview Schedule	
	Interview schedule (annotated in Critical Realism context)	134
	Appendix 2 – Consent to interview	
	Institutional Engagement with students - in the private sector: Information for interview participants	139
	Appendix 3 - Coding Schedule	
	Appendix 4 - Institution Profile A	
	Institution facts and sources	145
	Outline of governance structure:.....	148
	QAA findings.....	149
	Interview findings.....	151
	Appendix 5 - Institution Profile B	
	Institution facts and sources	185
	Outline of governance structure:.....	189
	QAA findings.....	189
	Interview findings.....	190
	Appendix 6 - Institution Profile C	
	Institution facts and sources	210
	Outline of governance structure:.....	213
	QAA findings.....	214

Interview findings	215
Appendix 7 - Institution D	
Institution facts and sources	231
Outline of governance structure:	234
QAA findings.....	235
Interview findings.....	235
Appendix 8 - Institution E	
Institution facts and sources	253
Outline of governance structure:	256
QAA findings.....	257
Interview findings.....	257

Table of tables

Table 1	41
Table 2	47
Table 3	97

Table of figures

Figure 1	48
Figure 2	48
Figure 3	99
Figure 4	102
Figure 5	113

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Abstract

This study discusses methods and motivations of institutional engagement with students in UK private providers. It takes into account a changing policy environment which increasingly encourages private institutions to enter the higher education market. A total of twenty in-depth interviews were conducted across five private institutions, with four comparable senior leaders interviewed in each institution. As a result, a conceptual framework is proposed which gives an insight into motivations and influences that shape institutional engagement with students in private providers. A dialogue can be identified between the student voice and an institution's ethos. Findings show how values and priorities of institutional ownership or educational mission shape their methods of engagement with students. Senior institutional leadership is recognised as a further major influence. In relation to the student voice in private providers, changes to the nature of the student body (size, nationality, level of study or educational background) are identified alongside the quality of the student voice, as major factors that determine how institutional engagement develops over time.

This study shows that external policy development affects both the student voice and institutional behaviour, without this necessarily leading to traditional HE practices. Whilst involvement in quality mechanisms and governance appears to be ubiquitous and similar to traditional HE practices, student representation in private providers is rarely independent and both selected and elected representation systems occur. Students' unions are not common and where collective bodies exist, these cannot be considered to be independent. Furthermore, the research does not confirm common assumptions of consumerist engagement with students by private providers due to commercially driven interests. Instead a more sophisticated continuum of institutional engagement has been observed, ranging from educational service delivery by institutions to educational co-ownership by students and the institution.

Grounded in Critical Realism, this study extends understanding of private university provision in the UK, and asserts that in future policy development care must be taken to accurately understand how the student voice in private provision emerges and is engaged with.

1 Introduction

1.1 Context of the study

The Higher Education Sector in the United Kingdom (UK) has long enjoyed a reputation as one of exceptional quality and high academic standards. This reputation has benefited from a sound quality assurance environment which is owned by the sector itself and strongly relies on peer review by highly qualified academics within a prescribed framework of formalised expectations agreed by sector wide consensus (QAA, 2015b). Within this framework students have long had a voice and the collective nature of this student voice within institutions is even enshrined in UK law (Government, 1994, CUC and NUS, 2011). The framework of protecting and upholding standards and academic quality has consistently been independent from government control and is only in extremis related to public funding decisions. Higher Education institutions in the UK have traditionally been private organisations (charities) largely depending on public funding, subject to laws specifically applying to them, but without being part of the public sector. The resulting unique arrangement of separation of funding, regulation, legal oversight, academic reputation management and institutional autonomy facilitated the development of a self-critical and strong provision of higher education.

Due to growing higher education participation rates, demands from employers for a more diverse portfolio of programmes, changes in national support for funding public services (including higher education) and international market developments, successive UK governments have changed this stable higher education landscape considerably. Recent governments, informed by the Browne report (2010) have sought to introduce a market context with the aim of encouraging innovation, effectiveness and change in the sector, with the stated intention that this will put '*students at the heart*' of the higher education system (BIS, 2011).

Against this background, three national contextual changes have taken place within a relatively short period of time, which are interconnected and relate particularly to the research undertaken in this thesis:

- Growth of the alternative providers' contribution to the UK higher education sector,
- Student fee increases in England and
- Increased emphasis on engaging students in the management of the quality of the student learning experience.

Firstly, the higher education sector in the UK has started to encourage entry into the sector of a number of providers who were not previously able to offer higher education (Fielden et al., 2010, Hughes et al., 2013). This includes further education providers, private education providers as well as companies, non-educational charities and other organisations wishing to offer bespoke higher education related to their specific organisational expertise and missions. Whilst, in the past, provision of this kind already existed, access to public funding of student places relied entirely on validation or franchising of programmes by traditional universities and colleges who held degree awarding powers. At the time of writing this thesis, the policy environment allows alternative providers to recruit undergraduate students and receive public funding of the student fee loans through the government's student loan book. '*Significant growth*' of funded student places for these institutions is planned for degree courses (as opposed to sub degree provision) (BIS, 2015c). Moreover, new policy proposals are being consulted on (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016), which will encourage more alternative providers to enter the HE market by structurally addressing regulatory pressures and enabling student fee funding to continue to be supported for alternative providers. The proposals also recognise that an increasingly marketized sector requires better student protection in case of institutions underachieving or failing altogether to provide appropriate provision. In this more enabling policy context, alternative providers are showing an increased interest in becoming financially and academically independent from accrediting institutions and are seeking to acquire degree awarding powers to do so. Noting the drive towards academic independence and the identified need to protect students, the emphasis on enabling the student voice to influence quality management and development has become increasingly important within alternative providers as well as the traditional sector.

Secondly, the funding context for higher education provision has changed drastically. Since 2004 a progressively changing fee regime has been in place which has effectively moved the burden of financing higher education study from the government to individual students. Whilst in 2004 the initial fees were £3,125 per annum, in 2011 a fee of £9,000 was introduced as a maximum for institutions in the traditional sector, and £6,000 for alternative providers. These fee changes and related debates resulted in increased public accountability expectations, with institutions responding to society, employer and especially (prospective) student interests more explicitly than ever before. Student interests have become more strongly represented in the process through various means, including through pressure from student representative bodies within institutions and the sector, through policy development such as by the QAA (2012a) and through direct accountability to individual students through the Office of

the Independent Adjudicator (2015). Within institutions these developments have led to an increased awareness of the opinions and interests of students in the quality, organisation and delivery of university programmes and the student learning experience.

A third strand of contextual change in the higher education sector is the increased engagement of institutions with the student voice. Whilst student feedback has long been part of common quality assurance mechanisms in UK institutions, in the last ten years a greater emphasis on new ways of engaging students in the assurance as well as enhancement of quality has developed. Notions of students as partners in the process of developing, evaluating and enhancing the student learning experience have given impetus to a stronger involvement of students and their representatives in the management of almost all aspects of the wider student experience. Student involvement in University learning and teaching governance is now well embedded in the traditional sector at least (Van Der Velden et al., 2013b). Students' Unions and their national collective, the National Union of Students, have worked closely with a range of sector organisations and institutional students' unions to support, enable and inspire this movement towards a greater influence by students. In 2012 the Quality Assurance Agency published a new chapter of its Code of Practice for UK Higher Education Institutions (QAA, 2012a) which provided a clear set of expectations regarding the level of engagement of students institutions should seek to establish in support of their quality management. The engagement of the student voice has since then extended beyond the quality agenda. Across the higher education sector student voice involvement in governance of institutions, cross sector organisations and policy development activity has become pervasive. The introduction of fees may be a factor in this development; although this is contested, some element of accountability to students as higher education 'users' is accepted to be part of the reason behind this growing involvement of the student voice in the ways described (Van Der Velden et al., 2013b).

The combination of increasing fees and accountability, the pervasive sector interest in the student voice and the increased entry into the higher education market by alternative providers give context to the relevance of this research. Existing UK higher education research tends to focus on the traditional, publicly funded sector. Entry into the sector by alternative providers is relatively new and limited in size, so private institutions have rarely been included in research studies. Alternative providers are now gaining presence but views on their educational provision differ. Whilst the current UK government suggests alternative providers offer innovation, employment relevance and

increased effectiveness (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016), there are also voices within publicly funded institutions describing alternative providers as a threat to quality, academic standards and the future of students' academic learning (McGettigan, 2013, Collini, 2013). In particular, concerns are being expressed about students being seen as paying customers by 'private' institutions with suspected consequences to academic standards. Noting the variety of alternative provider institutions, their missions, size, nature and ownership, neither of these views is likely to relate accurately to the whole of alternative HE provision collectively.

This research study was undertaken to provide insight into this previously under represented part of the sector in both a research and policy context. It is intended that increased understanding of student voice and representation practices in alternative providers will help to inform future policy development. Similarly, an exploratory investigation of practices and institutions' underlying explanations and motivations may provide new knowledge and insights to fellow researchers interested in either alternative higher education provision or student engagement within a UK context.

1.2 Aims of the research study and research questions

The research undertaken for this thesis aims to investigate what student engagement practices exists in alternative providers of some substantial size and what has led to the arrangements in place in these institutions.

Substantial research into institutional engagement with students in alternative providers does not currently exist. Some insights can be derived from reports by the QAA which record evaluations of student engagement (QAA, 2013), but these are limited only to quality related aspects and have been gathered in the judgmental environment of external review which limits their explanatory value. Moreover, when an alternative provider gains degree awarding powers, all review reports predating this achievement are removed from public access, thus allowing the development of only limited insight into trends and patterns across alternative providers.

With policy developing towards an increase in higher education provision by alternative providers and a related identified need to protect students from potential risks, understanding the arrangements for engagement with the student voice in alternative providers matters. If arrangements prevalent in the traditional institutions and those in alternative providers are similar, then the organisation of quality control and risk management can be informed by insights and experience from the traditional part of the sector. Alternatively, if institutional engagement practices in alternative providers

are essentially different, then effective student engagement may not be achievable via quality control arrangements, unlike in the traditional institutions. Identifying risks to the student body would then necessarily need to take place based on other indicators, which may require alternative policy, regulation or overview arrangements. It is with these wider considerations in mind that this research was undertaken. This research aims to investigate one particular aspect of higher education provision by alternative providers, which is the aspect that recent national policy sees as a core driver for diversifying the sector. This research asks how students are placed '*at the heart of the system*' (BIS, 2011), in this new part of the sector consisting of alternative providers.

The research question at the core of this thesis is: '*What methods of institutional engagement with students occur in private institutions in England?*'

As a further question this thesis seeks to answer: '*What influences the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students?*'

The aim of this thesis is to establish knowledge of institutional engagement practices which are being used by alternative providers and an understanding of motivations that have influenced the development of these practices. Aware of the different reasons for alternative providers to be offering higher education provision, specific attention is given to contextual drivers that may influence the manner in which institutions interact and communicate with the student voice, and to what purpose they may do so.

The research is set in a Critical Realism epistemology. This allows insight into an institution's actual practices and motivations to be established through qualitative means (interviews and written accounts) which capture the perceptions and understanding of representative research participants from within the institution. By interviewing multiple participants in each institution and collating a single institutional profile, a substantial insight into institutional arrangements and intentions can be achieved.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Following the introductory information provided in this first chapter, the second chapter gives the literature-based background to the research questions so as to ensure that the understanding of both institutional engagement with students and of alternative providers is based on previous research, reviews, investigations and policy documentation.

Chapter two starts with a focus on literature that relates to student engagement rather than institutional engagement with students. This is because research on the relationship between students and their institutions is usually undertaken by authors who research patterns of student behaviours and attitudes, or the power relations in universities that students play a role in. In student engagement research the students are the central subject of the research. This is particularly relevant to this study which relates institutional practices to national policy developments, with the latter focusing on steering institutional behaviours rather than student behaviours. For this thesis the subjects central to the research are the institutions and their engagement with students. Chapter two also proposes a categorised set of aspects of institutional engagement with students which forms the basis for organising interview schedules and the presentation of findings later in the thesis.

Chapter two then presents an exploration of research literature on private institutions. The term 'alternative providers' is little used in research contexts as the international research literature relates to private institutions and public institutions. 'Alternative providers' is a collective term used almost uniquely in the UK and stems from a policy context in which it is recognised that the UK's publicly funded universities are not publicly owned entities but private institutions. Hence conceptually 'private institutions' would in fact include the publicly funded higher education institutions. Chapter two also provides a more in-depth insight into UK policy affecting alternative providers and relates the fields of student engagement and private institutions to each other.

Chapter three introduces the reader to the research design of the thesis and explains how Critical Realism underpins the research design, methodology and analysis of the findings. The research is undertaken by interviewing four participants with a particular set of roles within five institutions. For each of the institutions an institutional profile is then drawn from the evidence gathered through interviews and a review of documentation. The chapter sets out in detail what steps were taken to establish answers to the research questions posed and evaluates potential weaknesses, risks and limitations of the research methodology used.

Chapter four sets out the research findings by institution. For each institution the institutional profile and interview material were analysed to record findings against each of the aspects of institutional engagement.

Chapter five presents a further level of analysis, this time across the five institutions involved in the research. The chapter separates the two core research questions so

that explanations and their interaction can be considered across the five institutions to identify patterns of institutional engagement with students. Here some of the differences between alternative providers and the traditional sector start to become clear. The second part of the chapter sets out institutional engagement practices common across the participating institutions. Reference is made back to previous research concerning institutional engagement with students in the wider UK HE sector, to gain further in depth insight and understanding of the findings, leading to the introduction of a theoretical model.

Chapter six draws main conclusions from the research and outlines potential implications of findings for policy and future research and closes with a short overview of my research journey.

2 Literature review and research context: student engagement

In this chapter the central research question of this thesis has been put into the context of existing research literature and relevant policy developments. This included reviewing international literature and narrowing the focus onto existing research dealing with the concepts which are of particular interest to this thesis. This chapter sets out the broad field of student engagement, the different areas of student engagement research within the wider literature and then proposes a working definition for institutional engagement with students and aspects of engagement with students which aid institutions to align, to a greater or lesser extent, institutional policy, practice and future educational development to the interests of students.

The final section of this chapter sets out the UK policy context, placing the professional doctorate research in a current and professionally relevant setting.

2.1 Institutional and student engagement in the literature

Building on a constant, core interest in the enhancement of student learning, research into student engagement has a long but varied tradition particularly in western research cultures. Trowler (2010) undertook a major literature review in which she recognised the mostly North-American ownership of the term 'student engagement' until the last two decades. According to Kuh (2009), the US based understanding of 'student engagement' changed conceptually through a range of constructs including 'time on task', 'student involvement' (Astin, 1984), 'social and academic integration' (Tinto, 1993) and 'Good Practices in undergraduate education' (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). These constructs have informed the current conceptual understanding of student engagement. Although several definitions exist (Kuh, 2003, Kuh, 2007, Pike and Kuh, 2005), in the US tradition a core feature of student engagement research is that it refers to students' interaction with educational activity and the educational environment, be it in behavioural, cognitive or emotional terms. US authors have researched student characteristics such as social-economic background, prior education, personal motivations and attitudinal characteristics (Pike and Kuh, 2005), whilst others have concentrated on the influence of teaching techniques and the development of a learning environment supportive to engagement (Harper and Quaye, 2009). In all cases this is related to how students interact with learning opportunities. Often this research refers to the annual National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) which has been built on these concepts of student engagement and provides ample data to research the topic further, both in the US and Canada (Pike and Kuh,

2005, Kuh, 2009, Kuh, 2003) and also internationally since the introduction of new versions of NSSE such as the AUSSE in Australia (Coates, 2010), the SASSE in South Africa and a Chinese version of NSSE.

The NSSE (2014) is also used to look at institutional influence, which is less about how students engage with the teaching and environment. Instead, Pike and Kuh (2005) set out to develop a way of classifying institutions by the student experience they provide. Examples of categories are “*Homogenous and Interpersonally Cohesive*”, “*Academically challenging but Supportive*” and “*High Tech, Low Touch*” (p194). Their work accepts the premise that it is not just student characteristics or teaching characteristics that influence student engagement (in behavioural, emotional or cognitive terms), but that deliberate institutional policy and practices also influence the student experience. This aspect is now also included in NSSE analyses. Whilst the research of this thesis does not relate to the NSSE, the work on institutional policy and practice influence on student engagement is of some interest.

As is clear from the above, the term ‘student engagement’ includes a wide range of interpretations, as recognised by Trowler (2010), Kahu (2011), Owen (2013), Healey et al. (2014) and Ashwin and Mcvitty (2015),. Some of these differences relate to the context of the nation in which student engagement concepts have developed.

2.2 UK and Australian research and relevance to the thesis research question

In Australia and the UK the research on student engagement has considerable overlap due to the early influential work of researchers and HE developers such as Ramsden, Trigwell, Prosser and others. As a result of their academic and professional involvement in HE systems, student engagement research in both countries is grounded in a common focus on the student learning experience. Within the UK and Australian fields, student engagement relates to both the engagement of students with their studies and learning (Solomonides et al., 2012, Bryson and Hand, 2007) and the institutional practices that support effective learning and a pedagogically effective student learning experience (Sellers and Van Der Velden, 2003). The conceptual underpinning for the UK and Australian based research and concepts are different from those in the US. Where in the US the research emphasis is on the student in relation to their learning, or as Coates (2005) states “... *individual learners are ultimately the agents in discussions of engagement*” (p26), UK based student engagement research has traditionally concentrated on the teaching effort or the institutional effort to stimulate student engagement (Trowler, 2010). Her definition of student engagement is

'Student engagement is concerned with the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance and reputation of the institution' (p3). This is close to the definition common in Australia: *"students' involvement with activities and conditions likely to generate high quality learning. A key assumption is that learning outcomes are influenced by how an individual participates in educationally purposeful activities. While students are seen to be responsible for constructing their own knowledge, learning is also seen to depend on institutions and staff generating conditions that stimulate student involvement."* (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2009)

For the question this thesis aims to address, an emphasis on the institutional angle is important, so as to allow focus on the *'methods of institutional engagement with students which occur in private institutions in England'*. In no part does this research question aim itself directly at the interaction between students and their learning activities or environment directly. Hence, the more learning related, or pedagogical aspect of student engagement research is not relevant to this thesis.

In UK and Australian research into student engagement in relation to institutional aspects, one group of researchers has focused on governance (Persson, 2003, Johnson and Deem, 2003, Farrington, 2000, Eliophotou-Menon, 2003, Van Der Velden, 2012a), and within this often on the aspect of student representation (Little et al., 2009, Lizzio and Wilson, 2009, Carey, 2012). Alongside this and with some overlap, sits a research literature that concentrates on the role of students in quality assurance and enhancement (Kay et al., 2012, Van Der Velden, 2013a, Harvey, 2001, Gvaramadze, 2011) and a further one which looks at the use of surveys such as the National Students Survey in the UK (Surridge, 2007, Richardson et al., 2007, Flint et al., 2009) and the Course Experience Survey in Australia (Davies et al., 2010). All of this literature is of interest to this research as it relates to some aspect of institutional engagement with students, be it the role of students in governance, the role of student representation or the role of students in the specific field of quality management (assurance and enhancement). That said, the survey related literature is only of interest in relation to how institutions respond to survey use, enhancement activity related to survey results and the role of survey outcomes within a performance measuring context. All research regarding the validity, reliability, relevance and political impact of national survey use is excluded, as it does not relate to the core research question (Carey, 2013c, Eliophotou-Menon, 2003, Young et al., 2009, Mcdaniel, 2015, Trowler, 1998, Ashwin, 2008)

At this point it should be clear that the focus of this research is on institutional aspects of student engagement, rather than on student engagement as the activity of students. For this thesis institutional engagement with students is limited to *'What motivations influence the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students?'*

There are a number of aspects that shape the way institutions seek to interact with their students in relation to their academic experience:

- the arrangements supported by the institution to organise the representation of student views, opinions and interests. In the literature this is often referred to as *'the student voice'*,
- the ways of engaging the student voice in the formal and informal institutional decision making, or *student involvement in governance*,
- any arrangements to engage students in the evaluation and consideration of the quality of the academic student experience or *student involvement in quality assurance*,
- the arrangements made to engage students in the development of the academic student experience or *student involvement in enhancement*, and
- the *perceived role of students within institutions* as shown in the way students are communicated with (and about) in the context of the listed aspects.

These five aspects together provide a multifaceted insight into the nature of how institutions organise their engagement with students. Each is based on some level of prior research, as set out below.

2.2.1 Student voice

In order to understand how an institution engages with the views and interests or 'student voice' of their students, it is important to understand how that institution enables its student body to express their views and interest. In the UK one of the traditional ways of organising the student voice is by the establishment of 'an association representing the student body' as expressed in the 1994 Education Act (Government, 1994) such as a Students' Union or Students' Guild. Whilst expectations on publicly funded HE institutions to constitute a students' union is established in law, this is done in a way which leaves for much interpretation and allows a considerable range of practices (CUC and NUS, 2011). A particular matter under discussion is the nature of representation. Traditionally representation is assumed to be by elected representatives, but this is not always the case and there are examples of systematic

use of selected representatives in some, especially smaller and specialist institutions (Van Der Velden et al., 2013b).

An alternative and often additional way of understanding the student voice is through institutional analysis of existing data or data collected to interrogate the specific matter of interest (Mcnay, 1995). Institutions in the UK that are in receipt of public funding or are subject to QAA oversight as recognised higher education course providers (BIS, 2015a), are expected to review data such as student intake, retention, progression, graduate destination as a matter of course. Some institutions add to this the regular review of sophisticated behavioural data such as engagement with the virtual learning environment and (online or physical) access to the library, or uptake of tutorial classes and appointments with staff, as indicators of (projected) student success as well as student preferences. As an example, an institution may conclude through monitoring of online library access and physical library loans activity that students prefer to engage with information and content online rather than through physical books and journals. This may inform the institution's understanding of student views and interests in relation to the academic student experience and thus result in greater institutional investment in electronic library resources.

There are also many examples of the use of both internal surveys as well as external surveys such as the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (Park, 2009) or the Student Barometer which are commonly used in the traditional higher education sector (Brennan et al., 2003, Harvey, 2001, Little et al., 2009), allowing institutions to achieve a greater understanding of their students' interests and preferences.

However, alongside these approaches common in publicly-funded institutions, sits a lack of insight into the way the student voice is organised in private institutions, to which the 1994 Education Act (UK Government, 1994) does not apply in the same way.

It is worth noting that the concept of 'student voice' has long been contested (Fielding, 2004, Robinson and Taylor, 2013). One aspect of concern with the student voice relates to the limitations of student representation (Carey, 2013c, Eliophotou-Menon, 2003, Little et al., 2009, Pimentel Botas et al., 2013), most notably in relation to minority views and the emphasis on full time undergraduate interests in representation and governance. Others call into question the ability of students to judge educational quality for instance in student evaluations (Young et al., 2009, Mcdaniel, 2015, Van Der Velden, 2013a, Williams, 2013) or raise more structural questions regarding the structure and agency of the student voice (Trowler, 1998, Ashwin, 2008, Van Der

Velden, 2013a, Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005). All of this research gives reason to caution when evaluating the meaning and influence of what the student voice may project. However, the contested nature of the specificities and influence of the student voice is not the focus of these investigations. Instead the research questions focus on the institutional engagement with the student voice. As such the organisation of the student voice, rather than the substance of the student voice is of interest. So whilst the contested nature of student agency is clearly recognised, it is not explored as part of the student voice aspect as defined in this thesis.

2.2.2 Involvement of students in governance

Within this thesis, governance in HE relates to the manner in which institutions organise themselves to achieve their goals, through formal means such as executive management, boards, committees and other decision making structures, and informal means (Huisman et al., 2006, Agasisti and Catalano, 2006, Salter and Tapper, 2002). Within the wider, well researched context of governance, the role of students in university governance has received some particular attention, both internationally (Zuo and Ratsoy, 1999, Persson, 2003, Michelsen and Stensaker, 2011, Farrington, 2000, Eliophotou-Menon, 2003, Boland, 2005) and nationally. Lizzio and Wilson (2009) have set out the experiences of student representatives within the governance structures of UK HE institutions and noted the need for institutions and individual key stakeholders in institutions to invest in making such governance involvement successful. This is also borne out in later research (Carey, 2012, Pimentel Botas et al., 2013) suggesting that for this thesis research it is not only important to establish how students are involved in governance but also how they are supported, encouraged and whether institutional governance arrangements have adjusted to encourage student involvement.

Several HE practice studies show that over time, student involvement in governance has become ubiquitous across the UK HE sector (Little et al., 2009, QAA, 2009, QAA, 2011, Pimentel Botas et al., 2013). All these reports consistently show that committee involvement at institutional and discipline level is more easily achieved than involvement at the intermediate (faculty/ school/ college) level. The Pimentel Botas et al report, and the accompanying project report that I wrote (Van Der Velden et al., 2013a), cover the only research where (two) private providers were involved. Our joint work suggested that in private institutions governance involvement by students is limited at all levels, due to a lack of a student representation system. The research for this thesis explores the involvement of students at all levels of private institution further. Alternative forms of governance involvement in private providers were expected to be

found as the presence of a student representative body is not a requirement outside the publicly funded institutions.

2.2.3 Involvement of students in quality assurance

Much of the recent research literature has focused on this aspect of institutional engagement with students (Gibbs, 2010, Gvaramadze, 2011, Pimentel Botas et al., 2013, QAA, 2009, QAA, 2011). Within the UK there is some overlap between this aspect and the governance aspect, due to the nature of learning and teaching related governance arrangements common to UK HE institutions. Quality assurance policy, as set out by the Quality Assurance Agency, expects institutions to put oversight of academic standards and quality within formal institutional approval mechanisms and thus within formal governance arrangements. Nonetheless there are arrangements that institutions may have in place that do not fall under formal governance such as participation in curriculum review panels, reviews of existing policy and practice (for example, a review of feedback on assessment) or simply providing feedback to the institution or a part thereof. Only five years ago, the use of surveys, focus groups and other approaches were seen as still under development in student engagement (Little et al., 2009) within the traditional HE sector, whilst colleagues and I found in recent research that such practices have now become standardised and ubiquitous (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013, QAA, 2011). Similarly, the use of staff-student liaison meetings at discipline level has gained sophistication; it is now more common to find student representatives increasingly chairing these meetings and feeding discussions through to higher level governance structures. All these approaches have been developed within a context of considerable policy change in the UK in a relatively short period of time (see below). As the same policy developments do not affect private providers in the UK in the same manner, this research will seek to identify how such institutions involve students in the quality assurance aspect in their efforts to align, to a greater or lesser extent, institutional policy, practice and future educational development to the interests of students.

2.2.4 Involvement of students in enhancement activities

Closely aligned to the quality assurance aspect of institutional engagement with students sits the quality enhancement aspect. In the context of this research, the latter is defined as relating to the development of processes, policies and practices to improve the academic student experience. Within the existing literature, different approaches to engaging students in quality enhancement activity are described, including engaging students as change agents (Kay et al., 2012), as researchers (Timmis and Williams, 2013) or as co-producers (Mcculloch, 2009, Carey, 2013b,

Brand et al., 2013). Whilst there are distinct differences between these roles, in all cases students become active contributors in the process of enhancing education although the underlying assumptions about the contributions students can and are invited to make are substantially different. These assumptions relate to the perceived role of students within their institutions and are described below.

Many other ways of involving students in quality enhancement are not captured under any of these three approaches, ranging from quality enhancement involvement through bidding for student led development projects, collaborative work by staff and student representatives in response to survey findings, enhancement proposals initiated at staff-student liaison committees, students' union-led surveys leading to policy proposals or enhancement activity resulting from open comments on surveys (Van Der Velden et al., 2013a). Without prejudice to any specific approach or methods, the research undertaken for this thesis explores how private institutions seek to engage students in quality enhancement efforts, be it through direct involvement, involvement through representation or through indirect routes such as providing feedback using surveys or similar.

2.2.5 Perceived role of students within their institution

In prior research (Van Der Velden, 2012a) I already explored how different ways of engaging with students related to the organisational culture of an institution. An existing organisational culture typology (Mcnay, 1995) was extrapolated to include institutional ways of engaging with students, specifically in relation to the perceived role of students within each type of organisational culture. In the underpinning organisational culture typology by McNay (1995) the perceived role of students within a corporate institutional culture would be expected to be that of "unit of resource"; in the collegium their role would be "apprentice academic"; in the enterprising institution "customer"; and in the bureaucratic institution students would be "statistics". In the extrapolated model I proposed and tested of how each of the roles might correspond with the manner in which students are involved in quality enhancement, how their opinions are gathered and engaged with and how the role of a collective student representation body (students' union) might be viewed by the institution.

More recently, colleagues and I mapped quality management and governance practices across a wide range of UK institutions, including a limited number of private institutions (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013). This research also looked at the perceived role of students within their institutions; our analysis showed that institutions viewed their students most strongly as stakeholders, then partners, then consumers and finally

experts. Institutional managers interviewed for this research made it clear they felt this influenced the way they involved students in the quality management practices that were the focus of the research.

In both these prior research efforts, the perceived role of students was identified as a combination of the place students, sometimes via their representatives, were given within the governance of the institution and the way they were communicated with or about. There was also consideration of the ways students were perceived as part of quality assurance and enhancement. When research participants discussed how the student voice was arranged and perceived, perceptions of the role of students became clear, for instance as consumers, clients, partners, stakeholders or experts. From previous research it was also clear that some institutions were deliberate in their enabling of the student voice after having decided on the type of role that was strategically or pedagogically desirable to the institution.

Having been part of both these research efforts, I have become aware of the importance of understanding the role of students within institutional perceptions, so as to understand why particular approaches towards any of the mentioned aspects of institutional engagement may be taken. Hence this is an important element to clarify in this thesis research into individual private institutions.

2.3 Student engagement in the UK: policy drivers

This section will clarify why the research question of this thesis is pitched in the particular way that it is. It is effectively allowing the research to add not only to the body of knowledge on student engagement and private higher education, but does so in a context with specific relevance to current UK policy developments. Trowler (2010 p.41) recognises the importance of student engagement in the context of policy: *“While none of the literature specifically addressed the issue of national policy, policy levers such as funding frameworks, systemic assessment schemes and quality frameworks could have a significant impact on encouraging, or discouraging, an emphasis on student engagement at an institutional level. For example, policy that framed ‘quality’ in relation to learning rather than teaching would require institutions to focus on what students are actually doing, rather than on what the institutions are providing for them to do or not do, as they wish; while funding being contingent on engagement rather than cruder measures of throughput rates and retention would allow funders a more nuanced view of value for money than the binary ‘graduated’ vs ‘dropped out’ model”*. Though it may be a very specific political agenda Trowler proposes, the issue of policy relevance of student engagement is a current one.

There is an increased interest in student engagement within the UK sector. In 2012 the Quality Assurance Agency for the first time introduced national policy on student engagement (QAA, 2012a), which meant all HEIs became explicitly accountable for the arrangements and effectiveness of their engagement with students. As part of developing this policy a nationwide consultation took place, the result of which illustrated the wide acceptance of student engagement as part of, at least, quality assurance and enhancement (QAA, 2012b). This was further confirmed in later research on the implementation of this policy (Van Der Velden et al., 2013a). The development of this policy came against a background of institutions' growing interest in student opinion, driven not least by a stronger public student voice facilitated by the National Student Survey (NSS). The NSS is an annual survey of final year students in institutions in receipt of public funding. Participation in the survey is a requirement of the annual financial agreement (memorandum) between Funding Councils and HEIs. The resulting data is made public and can be interrogated at institutional, discipline and where response levels allow, at programme level. The annual results are used by the sector to provide information for prospective students and by institutions for quality enhancement purposes, whilst public media use the annual results to inform university, subject and course league tables (Ramsden et al., 2010). The consequent public and competitive interpretation of the student voice has influenced the efforts institutions have made to engage with the student voice constructively. With the introduction of the requirement for students to pay university fees (Browne of Madingley, 2010) and subsequent phased removal of the student numbers cap (McGettigan, 2013), the higher education sector compares more strongly to a market than before, with increased competition between institutions to recruit students and ensure financial security. In this context, understanding student opinion and expectations has become a stronger priority for institutions.

These policy changes were developed between 2010 and 2014 under the leadership of the Minister of Universities and Science, David Willetts, who has well publicised views on increasing competition and opening up (quasi) markets so as to enhance quality of provision and broaden access for potential users (Willetts, 2010). The 2014 Grant letter from the Minister of University and Science and the Secretary of Business, Innovation and Skills to the Higher Education Funding Council of England gave a further indication of the intention to allow more alternative (including private) providers into the sector, as well as announcing an increased emphasis on student engagement (Willetts and Cable, 2014). In 2015 this was followed up by making favourable changes to the student number allocations for alternative providers (BIS, 2015a) and proposing easing

of access to the higher education market for alternative providers by the UK Government (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016). The latter specifically proposes 'levelling the playing field' for alternative providers and allowing a faster route to degree awarding powers and university title recognition than previously.

2.4 Private Institutions in the UK and global context

Within the UK higher education sector, private institutions are currently subject to increased interest partly due to ongoing growth, but also due to policy level interest in ensuring parity of quality and standards across a diversifying sector where both private and 'public' institutions are able to receive publicly funded student fees. A recent report by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (2014) illustrates the private sector growth as follows: *"For 2012-13, full-time undergraduate students who could access student support totalled around 25,000. This was projected to increase to near 60,000 in 2013-14."* These numbers relate to 67 private institutions which are allowed to receive public student funding. In 2011/2012 a total of 674 privately funded were providers operating in the UK, educating 160,000 higher education learners (at all levels), around half of whom were from the UK and this number may well have grown since (Hughes et al., 2013).

The growth of private institutions in the UK is part of a wider global trend (Bjarnason et al., 2009) where national higher education sectors are leaving space for new providers to absorb an increasing national population. Gürüz (2008) states that globally 30% of all higher education provision is private. Considering the difficulty of identifying the sometimes opaque delineation between private and public higher education (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011), this percentage should be treated with caution, but perhaps gives nonetheless an indication of the relative importance of understanding the practices and purpose of private higher education in a context beyond the national. More recently Levy (2013) also makes reference to a third of the higher education sector worldwide being in private hands, whilst Teixeira et al. (2014) remind us that many older universities in Europe were 'privately' owned organisations originally. However, due to increasing reliance on student sponsorship by those in (feudal or religious) power and subsequent introduction of control and early forms of regulation, some of the most elite and renowned universities have long since become public universities.

Bjarnason et al (2009) clarify that the recent growth of private higher education is strongest in developing nations, whilst only one of the developed nations (Japan) features substantially private provision of higher education where institutions are both fully privately owned and fully privately funded. In other economically advanced

countries private institutions that are purely privately funded are still limited in number, whilst there are many examples (such as the US) where privately owned institutions can receive state funding for student places.

Within the UK, private institutions are more commonly found in England, rather than in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Fielden et al., 2010). Scotland has only two private taught undergraduate programme providers neither of whom have degree awarding powers; some sub degree and English language provision is also provided by private institutions. The Scottish Government continues to focus its higher education provision within the public sector (Hughes et al., 2013). In Northern Ireland there is little private provision of note.

The current UK policy government intends to welcome a greater involvement of alternative providers (which includes private providers) in the delivery of higher education opportunities (Willetts and Cable, 2014, BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016). McGettigan (2013) describes the stepwise approach taken towards privatisation of higher education, starting with the demise of the block grant and the introduction of a student loan system, thereby removing subsidising of any courses and removing a competitive advantage for public providers over 'alternative' providers. In recent years the government has allowed alternative providers to recruit increasing numbers of students, thereby enabling growth of institutions and the alternative providers element of the sector (BIS, 2013, BIS, 2015c). A further expected change is the lowering of legal expectations relating to acquiring the title 'University' for institutions, thereby allowing a more equal competition between the traditional sector and alternative providers (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016). At the point of writing this thesis, the observation by Middelhurst and Fielden (2011) that there are still substantial differences in regulation and quality assurance between alternative and traditional providers (see below), still stands.

2.5 Typologies of private institutions

Categorising private institutions is complex (Brown, 2011), partly due to the fast changing environments (Marginson, 2007), but also because of the political, cultural and economic drivers that shape the form private provision takes (Fielden et al., 2010). Middlehurst and Fielden (2011) point out that a 'private sector' as a single entity cannot be discerned as institutions do not coalesce within a single country, or as a type, across countries. Especially in the for-profit sector, competition mitigates against convergence and collaboration. Moreover, the range of providers is highly heterogeneous, both in mission and interest as well as in age and institutional history and background. Some are established in the country they are based in whilst others

may be the international arm of an institution abroad, serving either students from the 'home' country abroad or recruiting students from the country they have branched into. Successive private providers leave and join the higher education sector and their missions are often not straightforwardly aimed at higher education as such. Many providers aim at offering sub-degree provision (entry into HE courses, including English Language), work at foundation level or provide content rather than full degree provision to publicly funded institutions, such as in the case of publishers offering a syllabus and assessment. Others offer student support services, skills development and tutoring activity, quite removed from the curriculum. Furthermore, there are arrangements which are not easily classified as either private or public, such as institutions that are largely dependent on public funding for their infrastructure, whilst tuition fees are privately afforded. It may be debatable whether publicly funded institutions in the UK where some (postgraduate taught) courses are almost exclusively taken by overseas international students, are not already moving into private provision for part of their portfolio. These illustrations show the complexity of defining clear typology for private provision.

The delineation between what is a private institution and what is a public institution by legal ownership is also not straightforward. UNESCO (Belfield and Levin, 2002, Bjarnason et al., 2009) applies this legal criterion which in the case of the UK means that all Universities are deemed to be private as they are legally independent and have their own governing bodies. The alternative criterion of introducing a demarcation by funding source provides little more clarity as the examples in the above paragraph illustrate (Middlehurst and Fielden, 2011). Even a delineation between for-profit and not-for-profit is difficult in practice as many UK institutions in receipt of public funding are working in an increasingly business-like manner and have several funding streams both through research and tuition fees which are intended to generate profit for the institution (Fielden et al., 2010).

The most commonly used approach towards categorising institutions is by intention and role within the wider sector of higher education provision. Private institutions may be established for a multitude of reasons, including philanthropic, philosophical and religious considerations but also entrepreneurial/ financial considerations or even a desire to move out of a heavily regulated environment. A common typology of private provision refers to (intellectual) elite, religious and demand absorbing (Levy, 1986); this typology was originally developed in the context of the Latin American Higher Education sector and based on prior work by Geiger (1996). More relevant to the European context is Levy's revised classification in Bjarnason et al (2009) which takes

into account a worldwide context: elite/semi-elite, religious/ cultural and non-elite/demand absorbing. In this classification the emphasis lies on the parameters of the student groups that take up the private education on offer: their academic or intellectual prowess, their religious or cultural background and interests and their socio-economic situation and related access to higher education or their religious or cultural background and interests. Levy adds to these two of the fastest growing types of private higher education worldwide which he believes to transcend these classifications: the for-profit section of the sector and Public Private Partnerships. Neither can be limited to the categories given above. For-profit organisations often fall into more than one of the types of private institutions, whilst Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) are not strictly private institutions. Levy describes PPPs as partnerships for mutual interest often of a combined academic and financial nature, such as public institutions gaining income from charging for validations and quality assurance oversight of private institutions without degree awarding powers. Another form of PPP is where a public institution starts accepting students who pay fees privately (also referred to as Module II students). The latter form has a strong presence in Central and Eastern European states. This type of private education is perhaps the direction of travel for some of the UK provision, with students privately paying their fees whilst institutions are essentially still publicly funded. For overseas students in UK public universities this is already the case. Considering UK HE institutions are autonomous and have independent charters, private funding through student fees perhaps changes the nature of engagement with government and regulation even more.

Whilst Levy's introduction of the concept of PPPs might help to understand UK developments and international bodies such as UNESCO also regard the introduction of privatised student funding as a form of privatising institutions, the UK government is of the view that tuition fees paid back through student loans should continue to be classified as public funding. For England at least, 'alternative' or private providers (the terminology is used almost interchangeably) are defined by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills as follows: "*Alternative provider means any provider of higher education courses which is not in direct receipt of recurrent funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) or from equivalent funding bodies in the Devolved Administrations; or does not receive direct recurrent public funding (for example, from a local authority, or from the Secretary of State for Education); and is not a Further Education College*" (BIS, 2013). Hughes et al. (2013) clarify in their research paper for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, that this effectively defines private providers by their absence of receipt of grant funding – an approach not taken anywhere else.

This definition of alternative or private providers relates to another aspect particular to the UK situation which makes use of Levy's typology difficult. As noted previously, UK institutions are not in fact publicly owned. Institutions are legally autonomous with their own governance and oversight arrangements, thus allowing universities within the publicly funded sector to hold elite/semi elite, religious/cultural and, since the demise of the control of student numbers, non-elite/demand absorbing focus. In some ways, this typology could almost be applied to the UK higher education sector as a whole, rather than to the private sector as different from the public sector. Hence for the UK a separate typology for private institutions is required, perhaps along more functional lines, concentrating on what provision institutions offer. Fielden et al (2010) have taken such an approach by activity or function of private institutions (p 14):

"Classification of UK private providers by function:

1. *Delivery of Academic content*
 - *Offering own degrees (using UK degree awarding powers)*
 - *Offering own non-UK degree (with accreditation overseas)*
 - *Offering own award in partnership with UK institution*
 - *Offering an award from a UK institution*
 - *Offering own certificated module within (or alongside) a partner university's degree programme*
 - *Offering own (overseas) online awards (with no UK face to face support)*
 - *Partnership in online course delivery*
2. *Academic support for international students in the UK*
 - *English Language and study skills training*
 - *Foundation year programmes*
 - *First year programmes*
 - *Pre-Master's programmes*
3. *Partnerships in providing content*
 - *Production of course materials under subcontract*
 - *Provision of online modules to fit within an institution's virtual learning environment*
4. *Other types of relationship*
 - *Partnership with private sector in continuing professional development design and delivery for third party clients*
 - *Contracted tutorial support in the UK and overseas*
 - *Educational testing and assessment services in specialist fields*

- *Granting of accreditation or quality assurance services in professional or technical fields*
- *Agreed articulation into a university's degree programmes from qualifications awarded by a private provider"*

This typology ignores the (non) profit related nature of private institutions, the mission or interest of providers or their providence. Within the context of this research thesis this is at least initially helpful. The research question of this thesis focuses on institutional engagement with students in relation to institutional policy, practice and future educational development. At a later stage the mission, providence and profit related nature of the private providers included in this research may still be of relevance to explaining practices in institutional engagement with students.

2.6 Levelling the playing field - public policy and private institutions.

Various authors (Belfield and Levin, 2002, Fielden et al., 2010, Kinser, 2006, Levy, 2013, Levy, 1986) recognise a common field of tension between private providers' independence from government, the allocation of public funding, and regulatory and quality assurance arrangements affecting both private and public providers (see also '*triangle of coordination*' (Clark, 1983). Different types of demands by government, the public sector and private sector may occur, often triggered by a change in balance between private and public provision. Where access to public funding by private institutions is increased, policy makers gain leverage to regulate private provision and ensure the quality of provision for those intending to benefit, usually society and students. This threatens the independence of private institutions but provides secure funding streams. Simultaneously, and particularly in a national context where the number of private providers is growing, public institutions may demand an increase of regulation and quality assurance with regards to these providers, to level the playing field for private and public institutions. Alternatively, and with the same aim in mind, public institutions may wish to deregulate the public sector thereby decreasing pressure on their own institutions whilst perhaps anticipating that the student market will prefer educational recognition from long standing public institutions over recognition by less established private institutions. It can be assumed that such a plea for deregulation is likely to occur when there is pressure on the total amount of public funding available, such as when public funding rules change and funding becomes available to private as well as public providers.

Within the UK Higher Education sector there are various tensions to be found, some of which are similar to those described above. Firstly the presence of private providers within the higher education sector has grown (HEFCE, 2014, McGettigan, 2013) with both for-profit and not for-profit providers having increased in number and size. One example of an existing private for-profit provider whose importance has grown is BPP, which started its private existence as a relatively small institution (BPP Ltd.) providing postgraduate law and some business related courses. BPP has grown its disciplinary presence so that it now provides full undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in a Business School as well as a Law School. BPP has also become part of the US based Apollo Group. In 2007, BPP acquired its own degree awarding powers and was one of the first alternative providers to do so in the UK, alongside the University of Buckingham, Ashridge College and the College (now University) of Law (Fielden et al., 2010). By 2014, a further four private (for-profit as well as not-for-profit) institutions have been awarded taught degree awarding powers by the Quality Assurance Agency. Hughes et al. (2013) confirmed in their research the existence of 674 private institutions within the UK. Although they recognised that by no means all of these will wish to grow in the way BPP has, their survey responses made clear the majority of providers were 'positive' about future growth. With growth in mind, clarity on quality assurance expectations so as to accelerate market entry and a lowered regulation threshold will be of interest to private institutions.

Secondly, the number of publicly funded students within private institutions has also grown, from 25,000 in 2012/13 to 60,000 (projected figures) in 2013/14 (HEFCE, 2014). New providers of considerable size and influence are also entering the higher education market. One of the private providers seen to be of influence is the publishing company Pearson. Pearson entered UK Higher Education initially providing academic content in a controlled manner, often with assessment elements, in support of traditional university curricula. Having established Pearson College, it now offers an undergraduate Business degree, validated by Royal Holloway University. Pearson owns seven qualifications awarding bodies, including Edexcel and whilst it had only 818 HE students directly on its books in 2012, its influence through the awarding of qualifications and provision of syllabuses to many universities is not inconsiderable (Hughes et al., 2013). In the same year, the number of private institutions that had 1,000 or more students was 35, with five private institutions supporting 5,000 or more students. The growth in student numbers across these private institutions poses a threat in the longer term to non-elite public providers (McGettigan, 2013) especially considering the fact that the fee levels charged by private providers tend to be relatively low (currently £3,000 to £6,000) (Hughes et al., 2013). This perception of competition

that is perceived by the lower charging and/or recruiting public institutions stimulates further interest in seeking to establish equality in the marketplace between private and public institutions. Addressing differences in regulation and quality assurance mechanisms is therefore as much of interest to public institutions as it may be to private institutions.

Against a background of market friendly policy interest, regulatory and quality assurance expectations on private and public institutions are indeed under active debate (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016). A consultation paper launched by the last government (BIS, 2011) already stated that regulation '*around access, price and information*' are not the same for alternative providers as for traditional providers and suggested a '*level playing field*' is required to '*open up the sector*' (p 47). The consultation paper was followed with two further consultations by the then government, one of which addressed the regulatory framework (BIS, 2012) whilst the second one sought feedback on the allocation of student numbers to alternative providers (BIS, 2013). Actual changes that lower the threshold for new entrants into the market were made in relation to the assignment of student numbers to alternative providers in 2014/15 (BIS, 2013) and to the introduction of quality assurance for all private providers (QAA, 2013). The latter is also linked to UK Border Agency requirements to keep an overview of international students. Nonetheless, it allows private institutions a first step into the long process of recognition, accreditation and ultimately achievement of degree awarding powers within the UK higher education sector. The QAA states that the only difference between private and other providers' engagement with the QAA is that for private providers degree awarding powers can only be given for a six year term after which these need renewing (McLaren, 2011). In 2015 a change of government leads to rapid development of a more liberal policy environment for alternative providers. Adjustments are made to clarify and ease designation arrangements (allowing an institution to offer HE degrees) and allow alternative institutions with degree awarding powers to recruit students without the limitation of a numbers cap (BIS, 2015a). A subsequent wider consultation on the future of Higher Education proposed a further levelling of the playing field for alternative providers, allowing greater recruitment growth opportunities and a lower threshold for acquiring degree awarding powers and university title (BIS, 2015d). At the time of finalising this thesis, detailed plans are proposed to lower threshold for entering the market for alternative providers, which include greater and faster access to degree awarding powers and University title, as well as more advantageous funding arrangements (BIS, 2016).

Levy (2006) suggests that the process of developing regulation for a new or growing presence of private providers can lead to governments opting for stringent regulations which force new entrants to develop in ways that emulate the existing forms of higher education which are public; this is known as 'coercive isomorphism'. This appears to be an apposite observation, noting the nature of increased regulation and enhanced quality assurance expectations on alternative providers in the UK until 2015. Levy however also notes that the introduction of stringent regulation often occurs when regulatory developments are delayed and the negative impact of private, unregulated presence has been able to establish itself. Delayed, coercive isomorphic regulation can result in immediate closures and mergers of those private institutions that fall outside the new regulatory expectations. It appears that the UK policy development seeks to avoid this, although it should be noted that some closures of alternative providers have already occurred, though rather more driven by immigration and visa concerns than quality considerations.

2.7 Institutional Engagement with students in a private context

Much of the research on private higher education provision focuses on social, economic and political aspects of national and global trends and makes little reference to institutional engagement with students as defined for this study. Instead, reference is made to student choice, social/economic access to higher education and students' financial (tuition paying) role in the private sector (Belfield and Levin, 2002, Bjarnason et al., 2009, Gürüz, 2008, Kinser, 2006, Levy, 2006, Bonaccorsi, 2014). Whilst these factors may influence how institutions engage with their students during their studies, institutional engagement with students as such is not addressed within this area of research.

A related field of research concentrates on the influence of the privatisation of education on academic values and educational quality. In recent years, the literature within this research field has taken an interest particularly in the consumerist role of students within a marketised system (Hursh and Wall, 2011, Naidoo and Whitty, 2013, Case, 2003, Williams, 2013, Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005). It provides a useful insight into the relationships, interactions and influence of different groups (students, academics, management and others) within the academic and national context. Reference is commonly made to marketization and the privatisation of student fees, showing a different discursive orientation and covering cross sector reflections rather than in-depth in-institution studies. Alternatively, the narrow focus of the relationship between students and academic staff is investigated. As the research for this thesis concentrates on the relationships and mechanisms of (deliberate) interaction by the

institution and its student body, this research does not easily relate to the research questions posed here.

In the context of student engagement, the very limited research that covers student engagement in private institutions specifically, relates to student engagement (behavioural) with educational activity as assessed through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Coughlin et al., 2009). Only two UK specific research reports could be found that relate to student engagement in the private context. Hughes et al. (2013) gathered student views of their experiences of private education, covering the nature of the student body (mostly mature, part time, distance learners), their motivation for study (career, employment and subject interest) and students' satisfaction levels, contact time and private engagement with learning. The authors found that students in private higher education in the UK appear to have perceptions of study and their institution which are similar to those in public provision. Whilst this is of interest in terms of outcome, this research effort does not relate to institutional engagement with student as conceptualised for this thesis research.

A more relevant research effort looked into the implementation of recently introduced national policy (QAA, 2012a) and involved both myself and one of the supervisors of this thesis. The study indicated that in the two private institutions interviewed, students' unions did not exist (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013). Instead unelected, appointed recent graduates, not necessarily from the same institution, were introduced to give a student voice on behalf of the student population. Rather than a representative voice, this role existed to help understand data from surveys and student feedback and co-design an institutional response. This was in contrast to institutions where the establishment of a student representative structure had been found challenging (for instance in public HE in FE provision and small specialist institutions) and hybrid forms of appointed and elected student representation were developed. The type of arrangements institutions put in place to make the student voice heard and understood are part of the 'methods of institutional engagement with students'. As this research mostly mapped engagement practices in publicly funded institutions, it can be used as a reference point for comparing practice in the private institutions evaluated for this thesis.

Finally one book chapter that evaluates student engagement in private providers appeared in 2013, evaluating the development of an ethos of engagement in private institutions (Rivers and Williams, 2013). This publication contributes to the understanding of the leadership aspect particularly.

In conclusion, whilst there is considerable research on both student engagement and privatisation of higher education separately, there is little overlap between the fields, significant when taking into account the specific conceptualisation of student engagement for this thesis research. Hence it appears to be the case that this research can make an original contribution to the body of knowledge with regard to an aspect which has not been researched previously.

3 Research design, methods and considerations

Noting the separate nature of research literature for student engagement and private educational providers as described hitherto, it should be clear why the research questions posed are exploratory in nature. There is no conceptual framework in the literature which combines both fields. This section sets out how the exploration of institutional engagement with students in alternative providers was undertaken and what considerations had to be taken into account in order to reach the decisions made concerning the research. This section focuses initially on the ontology and epistemology that drove my research design (3.1), followed by an explanation of the research design itself (3.2), the selection of the research sample (3.3) and the methods used to undertake the research (3.4 and 3.5). Then the method used to analyse the findings is explained (3.6) and finally ethical and validity issues are considered within the epistemology of Critical Realism and qualitative research methods (3.7).

3.1 Ontology and Epistemology

The ontology that underpins the research covered in this thesis fits within the tradition of Critical Realism. Roy Bhaskar's Transcendental Realism (1998) rejects the notion of reality as commonly understood in scientific objectivism, where reality and indeed truth are only that which is measurable, and material and behaviours are predictable and reproducible. Instead, Bhaskar offers an acceptance of (social) reality existing outside ourselves, regardless of whether we engage with it or how we interpret it, but accepts that part of that reality is precisely how we have come to interpret and have influenced our world. Critical Realism accepts that society itself, the relations between individuals or groups or agents and society, as well as the interpretation or reason which individuals describe to explain their position and their practices, are all part of a reality that we can understand and explain (Bhaskar, 2011). However, it is not the case that these explanations or interpretations all represent different truths, as is accepted in more extended forms of interpretivist or subjectivist ontologies (Gandesha, 1992). There is still only a single reality, wherein explanations help to approximate our understanding of that reality.

Critical Realism also accepts that where reality is understood, explanations and causality hold some level of complexity. Using italics to introduce terminology from the Critical Realism epistemology (Bhaskar, 2011, Collier, 1994), the understanding or *explanation* of reality comes from an understanding of individuals' *positions and practices* in a social *structure* and their reasons for organising their actions within society in particular ways. The structural presence of beliefs or practices are referred to

as *generative mechanisms* and an example of these are market mechanisms, or in this research, governance and quality assurance mechanisms. Behaviours within and resulting from such mechanisms are often predictable from prior reasons or *tendencies*. Beliefs, values and emotions or *causes*, which drive explainable behaviours or *tendencies* and actions or *events* are accepted as part of reality.

The relevance for my work of Critical Realism, lies in the difference between the scientific definition of reality and the ontology Critical Realism proposes. Whilst the first perceives reality as a closed system (scientific), Critical Realism defines it as an open system. In a closed system of understanding reality, observable reactions can be predicted, making controlled experiments repeatable and outcomes predictable. Within an *open system*, societies' and individuals' (*agents*) beliefs, values and emotions will vary. *Agents* – as opposed to matter in a scientific objectivist ontology - will not always respond in a single, predictable and reproducible manner to a cause. Accepting the diversity and complexity that come with the understanding of reality as an *open system* is *critical* to understanding society, organisations and in this case, higher education institutions. For this thesis, whilst various agents within institutions may have their own understanding and explanations for institutional engagement with students, it is understood that there is still a single reality and truth in terms of how the institution interacts with students.

As a researcher who is also a professional with responsibility for steering institutional engagement with students both in my own institution and at times nationally, Critical Realism tallies with how I experience the professional world I live in; one of awareness of the influence of individual and institutional (societal) explanations and causes of reality, as well as the realisation that my colleagues' potentially very different experiences of institutional engagement with students, are still relating to a single reality in which different agents act according to a range of tendencies and generative mechanisms. I am not alone in this. Easton (2010), who relates Critical Realism to organizational case study research, recognises the role Critical Realism can play in managerial professionalism. Moreover, I accept that the open system of the reality of institutional engagement with students includes my own influence (Maxwell, 2012) and that this should be recognised in my research (see 3.7.2).

3.2 Research design

3.2.1 From research question to research design

The research efforts described in this thesis were designed to answer the following questions: '*What methods of institutional engagement with students occur in private*

institutions in England?’ and ‘what motivations influence the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students?’

These questions are exploratory in nature, intended to lead to descriptive and explanatory findings (De Vaus, 2001) within the alternative provider section of UK Higher Education provision. In Critical Realism terms, the research is designed to enable me to understand what *explanations actors* in alternative providers might have and to what *generative mechanisms* or *causes* they might attribute specific *events* or *tendencies* of institutional engagement with students (Collier, 1994).

Currently, whilst there is limited insight into how alternative providers interact with their students, institutional engagement within the UK’s public HE sphere has received more attention. As set out in section 2.2 of the literature review, there are known aspects of institutional engagement with students, which together provide a framework for understanding. The five aspects used in this research are: the manner in which the student voice is organised in the institution, the engagement of students or their representation in governance, their involvement in quality assurance, their involvement in quality enhancement and the role assigned to students within the institution as perceived by key institutional staff.

It is against this framework that insights into institutional behaviours in private institutions as well as generative mechanisms, possible causes and motivations for future developments were captured. This was accomplished through interviews with individuals in such institutions, chosen to ensure coverage of all five aspects, as well as other observations relating to institutional engagement with students in alternative provision. The latter is done to ensure that any potential shortcomings of the framework do not leave matters of interest unexplored. The wider view is also included to ensure that if the alternative provision context influences institutional engagement with students in unexpected ways, this is captured as part of the research design.

Importantly the framework was derived from earlier research (Van Der Velden et al., 2013a) both in terms of literature and practice, thus providing some level of public institution knowledge to which the findings related to the alternative providers could be related.

The data generated from institutional staff were collated using the framework of five aspects of institutional engagement for each institution separately. The collation of information received from multiple actors within an institution strengthens the validity of

understanding of that institution, as multiple actors will respond to the same questions, allowing an approximation of what may be reality. To ensure that an even higher level of accurate understanding could be achieved, four of the five case studies also included scrutiny of QAA reviews, which institutions undergo with regularity against given benchmarks and expectations and which are led and performed by peers from within the HE sector. In one institution no such review had yet taken place, making it impossible to cross reference as intended.

The findings derived from this exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research are then summarised and critically discussed against known prior research, so as to enable further understanding and insight into institutional engagement with students in private providers.

3.2.2 Potential limitations of the research

Research into the relatively new field of alternative providers has some limitations. The private sector is growing fast and policy was developing whilst data was being collected. This means that the first interviews took place at a time when new policy was not yet known, while those interviewed later were aware of changes ahead. As interviews pertaining to each individual institution were held within a short period of time (weeks), there is coherence within each institutional case, but institutions that were engaged with later in the process were by then considering some new policy, such as the limitations to student number growth (BIS, 2015b) and the expected major changes to the UK quality assurance system (HEFCE, 2015). As a result, when contemplating the future, a question posed to explore motivations and beliefs, interviewees responded to different contexts. Moreover, within a fast changing policy environment it is possible that expectations with regard to institutional engagement with students might also change. There is no indication of such policy change yet, indeed there are indications that this may be one of the more stable expectations of future quality assurance, and yet substantial other environmental changes in the private sector may make the findings of this research relevant for a limited period only (see 5.3).

A further limitation to the research relates to the representative nature of the five institutions. These are all delivering at undergraduate level (at least) to more than several hundred students and are well-established institutions, or where they are smaller than this, they are new institutions owned by well-established educational organisations with significant intention to grow. The institutions included have degree awarding powers or have an expectation to be acquiring these in the future. The

alternative provision part of the HE sector which consists of over four hundred organisations, includes many institutions which provide other types of educational programmes, are different in size, nature of ownership and academic status. In short, the institutions included in the research cannot be understood to be representative of the private sector as a whole and the findings should be read as representing only a particular part of the sector. However, there are only a small number of established private institutions in the sector that offer fulltime undergraduate degrees, are in receipt of student fees generated through the student loan book and have several hundred or more students, or are organising themselves for considerable growth in the short term. This means that the five institutions selected constitute nearly half of the total number of private institutions that meet those criteria. Three of the institutions included are seen by the wider alternative provider community as models to aspire to. It is also the case that this part of the private HE sector offers precisely the type of provision where policy makers wishes to see expansion most of all, whilst public institutions have started to realise the innovative and agile nature of the stronger alternative providers such as these. Consequently the research has perhaps limited representative value across the breadth of alternative provision, but it does allow insight into institutions that are in a leading position within a specific part of the HE sector (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016).

The body of research into the student learning experience, academic practice or institutional governance in alternative providers is very limited. As a result, there is little accepted academic grounding to relate the findings of this research to. Whilst this is not unusual for exploratory research, it still poses a limitation. Related to this stands the issue of the iterative process involved in establishing the research question. Had an existing, well researched conceptual or theoretical framework for either institutional engagement with students, or student engagement in alternative providers been available, both framing and formulating the research question could have been more straightforward. In practice, the research questions changed many times, not least as the five aspects of institutional engagement with students has been reformulated frequently. Whilst this does then mean that the research questions and framework underwent considerable thought and readjustment, it should be considered that they are the result of a single person's consideration, with consequent risks of singularity and limited conceptual breadth.

Other limitations relate to the validity of the interviews, and specifically the research effects. These are set out in 4.7.2.

3.3 Selection of research subjects

Private institutions included in this research are those that are in receipt or applying to be in receipt of public funding through student fees at the point of interview and offer multiple full undergraduate degrees. They are also either of considerable size (several hundred students at least) or structurally working towards such student numbers. As a condition for benefiting from the student loan book they are subject to the scrutiny of the sector's self-regulatory quality and academic standards assurance regime, embodied in the Quality Assurance Agency and will be subject to the expected regulatory developments affecting alternative providers of Higher Education in the UK. Whilst this has the added advantage of public documentation usually being available (through the QAA), it is, for the research design, more important that there is a relatively equal footing between institutions regarding quality and governance policy expectations as far as quality assurance, student engagement and learning and teaching enhancement is concerned.

Within each of the institutions, four respondents were invited for interview. One was the institutional leader in charge of education, such as a Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or Dean of Learning and Teaching or equivalent (henceforth named Senior Leader, Learning and Teaching). A senior manager of a professional service in charge of quality of learning and teaching and the academic student experience was also invited (henceforth Senior Leader, Quality), as well as the leader of the student representation system or student voice (henceforth Student Voice Leader). Sometimes individuals in this role were selected and appointed by the institution, in which case they were labelled (staff). In other cases the role was taken on by a student (student). Finally an academic leader in charge of multiple degree programmes (Dean, Head of subject) was interviewed (Academic Leader). By interviewing these four people, I have intended to study student engagement practices, tendencies and generative mechanisms from different individual positions, with a view to establishing explanations and causes that may explain the mechanisms, practices and tendencies in each of the institutions. The combination of these four interviewees covered the range of five aspects of institutional engagement with students (see section 2.2); some overlap between interviewees is expected, thus allowing checking of accuracy of answers as well as accuracy of my own understanding of answers provided.

It was intended that six institutions were studied in total, so as to achieve a broad set of positions and explanations of student engagement practices from the 24 respondents. The institutions selected offered full-time undergraduate degrees in more than one subject, and already had several hundred or more students or were being structured to

accommodate such a size or more. The relevance of size and subject breadth is that without these characteristics, institutional mechanisms and structures would not be comparable. Within the alternative providers, student numbers can change dramatically year on year (note Institution D) hence it is structure and intended size rather than actual size that matters. The criterion relating to full-time undergraduate degrees was used to allow comparison of findings with relevant literature on institutional engagement with students which mostly concentrates on full time provision. In the case of part time provision or distance learning, the nature of the student body is known to change considerably, creating a very different student voice than in a more 'traditional' full-time undergraduate setting (Van Der Velden et al., 2013a, QAA, 2011, Little et al., 2009).

It was also intended that half of the institutions included would be not-for-profit institutions whilst the other half would ideally be for-profit institutions or be owned by a for-profit entity. By interviewing both types of entity (for-profit and not-for-profit) it was anticipated that possible motivations due to profit generating desires could be determined and considered. In practice, a somewhat different balance was achieved, with one institution being a for-profit provider, two being not-for-profit providers and two institutions being a not-for-profit entity but being owned by a for-profit organisation (company) which was reflected in the membership of the governing boards. The wider range actually provided a more representative sample of the different types of ownership of institutions that are present in the sector.

Overall, it has been challenging to gain access to appropriate alternative providers. As a result, despite allowing a year and a half, interviews took place in each of *five* institutions rather than *six*. One institution initially accepted but then withdrew due to *'developments that occupied senior managers otherwise'*. As there was an indication of this being a temporary state of affairs (coinciding with changes in the governing board), an invitation to participate in the research was made again a year later, but was unsuccessful. A second institution committed to taking part in the research, but then ceased responding and was sold very shortly afterwards. This institution has not responded to subsequent requests. A third institution closed all intake for the following academic year and this made participation in the research inappropriate. A final institution committed to participation and one of the Directors of the institution confirmed this in person, but then ceased communication. It is not clear what the consideration here was. Because of the criteria set for inclusion of individual institutions in the research, it then became impossible to recruit the sixth and final institution. Four

of the five institutions were found through personal networks, whilst only one institution responded to a 'cold call'.

Table 1 below sets out the legal status, size of student population, number of fee loans, number of courses, disciplines covered and academic status of each of the five institutions that were included in the research at the time of interviews.

Table 1: overview of institutions included in research

	Institution A	Institution B	Institution C	Institution D	Institution E
Legal status	Private not-for-profit, owned by private for-profit company	Private not-for-profit, part of not-for-profit organisation	Private not-for-profit, owned by private for-profit company	Private for-profit	Private not-for-profit
Approx student nrs, loan book nrs (2012/13)	10,000+ students, 1104 loans	1800 students, 57 loans	150 students, no loan book numbers declared	400 (2900 in 2011), no use of loan book	4000 142 loans
Courses (under graduate)	30-40 Business, Law, Finance	3 Banking, Business, Finance	7 Law, Business, Accounting, Creative Studies	2 (+4 HND) Computing, Health, Business, Hospitality management	10 Accounting, Drama, Business, Film, Finance, Fashion, Internat. Relations, Law, Liberal studies, Management, Media, Marketing, Psychology, Psychotherapy
Academic Status	Degree Awarding Powers, University status	Degree Awarding Powers, University College	Validated degrees	Validated and franchised degrees	Degree Awarding Powers, University Status

3.4 Use of interviews

Because of the exploratory nature of the research, interviews were chosen as the main method for mapping and understanding practice in alternative providers. Where surveys are generally highly structured and demand a relatively firm grasp of potential answers to questions, interviews allow an exploratory approach to inferring reality from individuals' beliefs, experiences, motivations and the events they describe.

Observational techniques would have been impossible, because of the difficulty of gaining access to alternative providers and the obstacles this would have caused in performing the research at all. Similarly, scrutiny of documentation (such as governance papers and minutes, project materials and quality monitoring documentation) would have been equally impossible as it is most unlikely that access would have been provided. Hence interviews were used, but where possible combined with cross reference to relevant public documentation.

The interview schedule that was developed (appendix 1) consisted of two parts. The first section contained eight factual questions to establish the legal and academic nature of the institution, the number of students involved in undergraduate degree programmes, the type of degree programmes provided and the range of provision the institution offered. Not all of these aspects can be reliably determined from other sources, although those were checked where information was available. Most notably, sharing the size of an alternative provider was perceived as contentious by interviewees for competitive reasons. As there were four respondents from each institution, an indicative picture could nonetheless be established and cross checked.

For the second section of the schedule, a semi structured interview approach was used (Breakwell et al., 2007, Cohen et al., 2005). This was a deliberate choice as the research was meant to be exploratory in nature. By restricting answers valuable information might have been missed. Instead, respondents were free to cover a wide range of institutional practices and motivations in response to ten open questions. The questions were designed to cover the five aspects of institutional engagement with students and in all interviews I ensured that all questions were covered. Depending on interviewees' personal style, openness and willingness to discuss institutional engagement with students, the interview schedule was adjusted as required.

All questions were open ended (Breakwell et al., 2007), though with some questions cues were given to help direct the interviewee towards different possibilities (Cohen et al., 2005). One example of a question where cues were provided was '*If you were to hazard a guess, what might future developments in your institution be, in relation to*

engaging students?' with the following cues: '*new regulation, introduction of student loan book effects, competition with other institutions, influence of immigration controls (for alternative providers with international interests), QAA developments?*' (question 16, appendix 1).

The cues were not immediately provided, but in most cases were used to help respondents formulate their answers. Whilst it had been feared that providing cues might limit respondents to only those terms provided, this proved not to be the case. Other terms were introduced by respondents themselves. Probing and follow-up questions were also developed to invite an increased depth of information.

The interview schedule was piloted with a Senior Leader (Quality) from an institution that was ultimately not included in the research sample, but did meet the criteria for inclusion. The interviewee had relatively recently undertaken doctoral study and was well positioned to provide critical feedback on the schedule, the experience of being interviewed and the manner in which I interpreted the interview responses. As a result of this pilot one question was rephrased for clarity whilst more detailed questioning was included to ensure correct understanding of the legal nature (for-profit nature and institutional ownership) of the selected institutions. In advance of the pilot interview a particular concern was whether the term 'engagement of students' would be understood, but the pilot showed this was not an issue. In the twenty interviews undertaken this term did not require further explanation.

A short document (appendix 2) was prepared that provided interviewees with an outline of the intended research, the interview process, the research supervision arrangements and the consent and confidentiality arrangements. This was approved by my research supervisors before use and compared to interview consent forms used by other postgraduate researchers. It was sent out in advance of all interviews to ensure interviewees fully understood what they were participating in. At the beginning of each interview the confidentiality arrangement was repeated and interviewees were asked to confirm they were content to commit to the process. No objections were made although in one case the interviewee indicated that two statements needed confirmation by another interviewee before they could be used as part of the research. Both were confirmed in a later interview with the relevant senior as requested.

Seventeen interviews were undertaken by phone and recorded for transcription. Three interviews were undertaken in person, as preferred by the interviewees. All interviews were recorded using an audio recorder, following consent from the interviewees. It was

clarified both at the start of the interview and in the consent statement that was provided in advance, that interviewees could withdraw from the interview at any time and that none of the responses would be attributable either to the interviewee or their institution. None of the interviewees have withdrawn any part of their interviews. In one case the recording equipment failed and post-interview notes were made. These were shared with the interviewee who was invited to comment, but did not do so. The content of this interview was carefully cross checked with the content of the three other interviews relating to that institution, so as to avoid any inaccuracies due to any shortcomings of my memory of the interview.

All interviews were transcribed by a single transcription service, with all data treated confidentially. Returned files were then transferred into NVivo which was used to code the responses.

3.5 Data construction

In order to take a methodical approach to understanding institutional engagement with students, data had to be provided for each individual institution, rather than collated from twenty individuals across each institution with further factual data pertaining to the institutions added separately. By drawing up a profile of each of the five institutions based on both documentation external to the institutions and in-depth interviews, it was intended that a rich picture of institutional engagement would emerge.

3.5.1 Interview data

All transcribed interviews were coded using NVivo. The coding was designed to allow categorical analysis (Breakwell et al., 2007) against the five aspects of institutional engagement with students. These codes are listed in appendix 3 with an explanation of what each code means. The initial list of codes was considerably shorter, with several additions made after the first interviews had been coded. Mostly this was to allow for further refinement of coding, for example by splitting the different types of representation by students into elected, selected and other, as well as allowing for separate coding of plans for the future on each of the aspects.

Most notably, a sixth section was added, allowing for coding of specific characteristics of the organisation relating to three aspects: how those in power might wish to position the role of students; the influence of funding and financial considerations (public funding and for-profit considerations); and the top level management arrangements of the institutions included in the research. The awareness that these aspects needed including in the coding resulted from the experience of the pilot interview. There were

clear indications that for-profit ownership influenced institutional engagement with students and that the manner in which the executive and academic boards were organised would give further insights into how students might be perceived. In particular, membership of the highest level academic board as well as executive groups was a topic introduced and discussed by interviewees that illustrated political and organisational considerations of institutional engagement with students. These aspects were therefore worth capturing.

3.5.2 Written material

Interviews allow the recording of individuals' experience of reality within their institutions, which are generally based on beliefs, understanding, motivations and mechanisms also developed within that institution. Whilst there are distinct advantages to infer reality from four interviewees' accounts, there is a risk of internal coherence to a level that perhaps does not provide a full picture of institutional practices. To increase rigour and widen the breadth of knowledge about each institutions' engagement with students, information generated by authors external to the institution has therefore also been taken into account (external reviews, data collections and similar). Moreover, by undertaking document review in advance of interviews, the quality of interviewing can be improved. Knowledge of context, history, academic as well as legal status and external evaluation of institutional engagement all aided my ability to ask searching (follow-up) questions. In some cases, this meant that even before interview one influential mechanism for change (external quality review) was already understood and this understanding could be used to explore whether this influence or other influences created changes in practice or led to change and debate in the institutions. Indeed, many interviewees referred to such external influences themselves.

The document reviews were the same for each institution, although in one case, not all documentation existed as yet. Firstly factual information was established through scrutiny of the institutions' own websites and public information provided by Unistats (2015). The latter provided insight into the programmes offered, their academic level (undergraduate, post graduate, foundation programmes and top-ups) and how programmes were offered (full-time, part-time, distance learning and other). Institutional websites provided in some cases a helpful overview of governance structures and a history of the institution including reference to university status, degree awarding powers and validation arrangements.

Secondly, student loan book information publicly available from the Student Loan Company (2014) was used to establish whether and how many of the institutions'

students took up student loans. The uptake of student loans, in combination with the academic status of the institution, gave insight into the level of compliance with national policy the institution had committed to, including compliance with the QAA Code of Practice on student engagement (2012a). However, the student loan information is dated. The most recent data available was published in January 2014 and referred to 2012/2013 student data.

Finally, public reports resulting from Quality Assurance Agency reviews (2015a) were analysed for any reference to student engagement practices in relation to quality assurance and enhancement. In recent years the QAA has increased its focus on student engagement practices and reports on this as a matter of course. Findings were summarised and noted in the institutional case description.

3.5.3 Institutional profiles

For each institution a profile description was constructed from the four interviews relevant to that institution and the written material collected. All data was anonymised to avoid recognition of the institution or the individuals involved. Interviewees were referred to by their (coded) roles rather than their actual job title. Each institutional profile consists of two parts.

The first section captures institutional information gained from both written material and (verification by) interview. This provided assurance that the criteria for inclusion of the institution as a research subject were met and also provided contextual information to aid understanding of institutional engagement practices. Contextual information included an overview of the institutions' governance arrangements as well as a summary of student engagement related findings from reviews undertaken by the QAA. In one case no QAA review was available since, due to the recent establishment of the institution, no external review had yet taken place.

The second part of the profile was written up from interviews and document findings, organised around all five aspects of institutional engagement with students as well as a section on future developments and other findings worth noting. Quotes from each of the relevant interviews were extensively used, each of which was given its own reference code, as explained below.

Table 2: Coding system for interview quotes

Institutional code	A, B, C, D, E.
Interviewee code	
Senior Leader (Learning & Teaching)	SLLT
Senior Leader (Quality)	SLQ
Student Voice Leader	SVL
Academic Leader	AL
Number of Quote by individual interviewee	1-n
Full code: Institutional Code/ interviewee code/ number of quote by individual Example: B/SVL/11 refers to 11 th quote by the Student Voice Leader from institution B	

Referencing in this way allows for findings to be related back to individual quotes from interviews, thus showing rigour in the drawing together of findings and ultimately conclusions. Moreover, the referencing used allows the reader to note whether a finding is supported by a particular type of respondent (interviewee code) or not. This is relevant to findings of a specific nature, such as reference to national quality policy, which may be referred to by Senior Leaders (Quality) as an indicator of their professional reference, or a wider range of interviewees, indicating pervasiveness of policy relevant to student engagement.

3.6 Analysis in a Critical Realism epistemology

As has become clear in the paragraphs above, the interview and document findings were reproduced in the form of institutional profiles. According to Seidman (1998) in Maxwell (2012) profiles are a form of narrative strategy that can be used in Critical Realism to show connections between events and structures, that allow for a 'story line' to appear which aids the reader's understanding. Maxwell describes how Seidman's approach is used to include those elements from interviews that are relevant to the research, whilst deliberately omitting those elements that are not relevant. By collating the relevant elements in an understandable order, a wide ranging collection of 'data' from interviews can be produced as a narrative which gives coherence and therefore increases understanding. The resulting profile is traditionally most often that of an individual participant in an anthropological, sociological or clinical psychology study, but has in this case been applied to each institution as a subject in the study.

Critical Realism recognises *events*, *mechanisms* and *structures* as crucial to

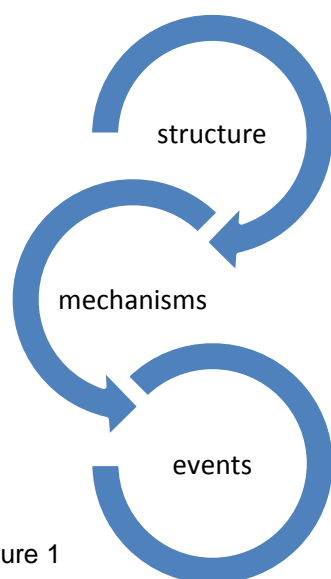


Figure 1

understanding social realities such as organisations (Sayer, 1984, Bhaskar, 2011, Collier, 1994). *Structures* are combination of objects, be they social, physical or attitudinal, with the capacity for behaviours which in Critical Realism are understood as *mechanisms*. In the context of this research a typical example of a *structure* is an institution's governance arrangement. Within a *structure*, there are powers and agents which can cause a particular behaviour (events).

In this research one Vice Chancellor of an institution (agent) has particular views on the inclusion of student representation in committee membership, which steers behaviour with the institution (Institution A in the analysis). There is also mention of external policy which requires an institution to include student representation, and requires those representatives to be trained and supported. Both the influence of the VC and the influence of policy are recognised as *mechanisms*, creating new behaviours within or alongside the existing structures. *Events* are those matters, situations or occurrences,

often observable, that 'happen' in the situations that we study, in this case, the inclusion of student representative in the committee membership and the existence of training for representatives and chairs.

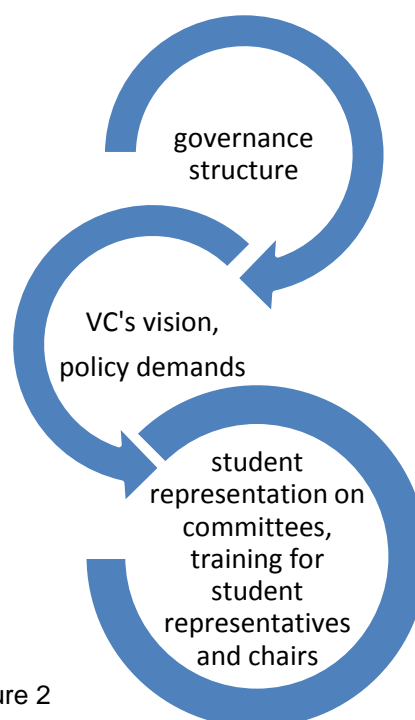


Figure 2

For this study, against each of the aspects of institutional engagement, the data captured in the institutional profiles was analysed to identify events and structures, with

a view to understanding the mechanisms that generate institutional engagement with students.

This approach relates closely to the two research questions posed for this thesis. The first question relates to the structures and events that describe '*what methods of institutional engagement with students occur in private institutions in England*'. By capturing the structures and events of each institution this question was answered for each institution individually at first (chapter 4). Subsequently, further analysis was undertaken to capture findings across the five institutions that participated in the research, to establish patterns, common findings and further aspects of (research) interest (chapter 5).

As a further question this thesis seeks to answer; '*What influences the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students?*' This second research question was explored by identifying the generative mechanisms from the institutional profiles that explain why the structures and events may have developed as they have. In order to establish the mechanisms that generate particular behaviours and therefore identifiable events within a given structure, some level of interpretation or inference is required (Easton, 2010). Reference will also be made to my own prior knowledge of the field. The inferred generative mechanism(s) are described with reference to explanations given by those interviewed and knowledge derived from review of documentation and literature and policy review. Understanding will also be informed by the researcher's knowledge of student engagement, policy expectations relating to student engagement and knowledge of institutional practices from previously undertaken research (Van Der Velden, 2013a, Van Der Velden et al., 2013a, Van Der Velden, 2012b, Pimentel Botas et al., 2013, Van Der Velden, 2012a) and professional experience.

3.7 Ethical and validity considerations

3.7.1 Ethical risks

Overall, the ethical risks relating to this research were not significant. The topic of research is at most commercially sensitive, but due to the anonymised nature of the data presentation this is not likely to cause any actual risks. The documentation used for this research was publicly available and the interview questions were not contentious or personal in nature. When individuals were interviewed, they were not invited to comment on other individuals and few such comments were made. In those cases, the research findings only make reference to roles in an anonymised setting.

None of the materials gathered in the process of the research were shared, other than with the transcription service with whom confidentiality arrangements were made. In particular, no students working for the service were used to transcribe the interviews to avoid any accidental reference to an institution they might relate to.

3.7.2 Researcher effects

Researcher effects can influence the effectiveness of interviews both negatively and positively. Influence can occur due to factors occurring prior to the interviews (route of introduction or researcher affiliations for instance). There are also research effects that influence the quality of responses whilst an interview takes place (Breakwell et al., 2007, Cohen et al., 2005). Personal presentation, style of questioning, use of vocabulary or even accents can influence how an interviewee responds. As an interviewer with professional affiliations and some policy and public involvement relevant to the research, I had to consider potential effects carefully. Hence I designed the research and the interviews in such a way that any negative effects related to my interview style or personal connection with interviewees might be limited. I used both documented materials as well as interviews, and for each institution four interviews were used to collate insight into the institution. The use of multiple interviews and the use of external (QAA) reviews was intended to mitigate against any potential unintended researcher effects.

Maxwell (2012) notes that in qualitative research based in Critical Realism, objectivity is important and any research motivations, beliefs and theories can influence findings and conclusions. However he also refers to Tolman and Brydon-Miller (2001) who note that there cannot be an expectation that such a bias is excluded. Those same beliefs, motivations and theories can however also be conscientiously used as a reference framework to understand subjects' responses and both deepen and question their contributions. Yet when the research material is then processed, awareness of researcher bias needs to inform careful and critical analysis, evaluation and presentation (Maxwell, 2012). In my case, I believe that my involvement in considerable discussion and critical debate over recent years within my own and other institutions, as well as in policy and research, allows me to consider alternative understandings and analyses of the research findings, in addition to my own.

However, it became clear that the process of gaining access to institutions, acquiring consent and undertaking the interviews increased the risk of researcher effects. Alternative providers were not often open to being interviewed and allow insight into their practices, citing a negative press and discontent within the public sector about the

growth of alternative provision in Higher Education. Consequently, personal connections were used to gain access to institutions, working through colleagues I had previously worked with, who were fellow experts on a policy development grouping or I had met through study and learning. In one case a senior manager of a mission group supported the process of making an initial connection. In only one case, I had no prior connection to anyone in the institution. I am also aware that my own national roles gave me a profile which could potentially lead to interviewees giving politically desirable answers. Senior Leaders (Quality) could reasonably be expected to be aware of my involvement in the development and implementation of the QAA Code of Practice (2012a) as well as my involvement in a recent research project (Van Der Velden et al., 2013a) on embeddedness of this Code. I was therefore concerned that my presence might lead to desirable answers being given in interviews. In practice I found that there were interviewees who after the recording ended, referred to my 'expertise' and asked for comments and advice on some of the issues they had raised. On evaluating these interviews I noted that the way in which the research relationship between interviewees and myself had developed, had not prevented them from sharing knowledge about weaknesses or being critical of policy in their responses.

Within Critical Realism, such relationship development is a known occurrence (Maxwell, 2012) and is accepted on the grounds that research relationships cannot be viewed as variables that can be controlled and manipulated as in empirical research. Instead, the development of a research relationship – whilst the influence of potential power and position needs to be considered – allows for a more informed and dynamic understanding of the motivations, beliefs and theories of the interviewee. By being explicit about researcher effects when starting to engage with individuals participating in the research, the researcher can enable a relationship to develop which limits the effects of power and position assumptions and mitigates against response bias. It is for these reasons that the advance information about my research study contained reference to my prior research and involvement in policy, as well as relevant professional affiliations. In particular, the initial contact made with institutions included a more detailed explanation of how my prior work in the public sector differed substantially from this current research with alternative providers. Respondents who knew me already were particularly positive about undertaking the research activity and developing a working relationship.

During the interviews some interviewees referred to my prior work directly, usually to having read some of my published work or having attended a presentation I had given. Some interviewees also referred to the reputation of the University of Bath in relation to

student engagement and the student experience in general. In those cases, the reference was made to illustrate statements about how different alternative providers are from public sector institutions, and I did not feel this influenced the quality of the research material negatively. The majority of interviewees did not refer to any of these potentially bias-causing factors.

4 Analysis and Findings by institution

In this section, findings generated through the analysis of data from institutional profiles are presented for each institution in turn.

Analysis is undertaken against each of the five aspects of institutional engagement with students (student voice aspect, governance aspect, quality assurance aspect, enhancement aspect and role of students, see section 2.2). Reference is made throughout the findings sections to the quotes from interviews which can be found in the appendices (4-8). This is done to allow the reader to follow how findings were inferred from the interviews.

After a brief factual introduction to the institution, findings are produced for each of the two research questions separately. The first section 'methods for institutional engagement with students', addresses the first research question: '*What methods of institutional engagement with students occur in private institutions in England?*' In these sections, relevant structures and events relating to each of the five aspects of institutional engagement with students are set out.

The second section for each institution gives an analysis of the generative mechanisms and their collective interactions that may answer research question 2; '*What influences the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students?*' These sections are called 'Explanations for the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students'.

4.1 Institution A –findings

At the time when the interviews and document research were undertaken, Institution A offered 18 degree courses at undergraduate and post graduate level to an estimated 10,000 students in 2014/15. The multi-site institution holds degree awarding powers and has University status. The institution covers disciplines that are professional and vocational in nature.

Institution A is a private, not-for-profit provider, owned by a for-profit company. Whilst any profit is reinvested into the institution's educational provision, the interviewed staff refer to the institution as profit making and the institution's online material refer to the institution in business terms. Online statements by the institutional leadership further underline the presence of a commercial ethos.

4.1.1 Overview of findings for Institution A

This section consists of two sub sections of findings, each related to one of the research questions of this thesis. The first section intends to capture an overview of the ***methods of institutional engagement with students*** in Institution A. The second sub section evaluates the explanatory powers of the identified mechanisms across all Institution A findings, so as to infer ***what influences the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students***.

The full institutional profile of Institution A can be found in appendix 4

4.1.1.1 *Methods of institutional engagement with students*

Staff in Institution A recognise student representative structures as the most influential route for **the student voice**. In this institution three separate strands of representation exist. One relates to the social and cultural aspects of the student experience and this is the responsibility of the Students' Association. Secondly, Staff Student Liaison Representatives are elected annually to influence the academic student experience (A/SVL/2). Finally, an elected group of students represent the student voice through involvement in the governance structure of the Institution. Students within this group are trained, well supported and in some circumstances paid for their efforts. Senior staff in the institution select from this group students for participation in occasional reviews and projects. All representation is overseen and led by a Chief Executive of Students who is selected and appointed by the institution (A/SVL/4) whose role is to *'enhance student engagement, improve the student experience and represent the student voice'* (A/SVL/2). Successive Chief Executives of Students are deemed to have been very influential in the institution (A/AL/1, A/SVL/5).

The institution is in the process of changing the student representative students to become independently representative of the student body, with only elected representatives, much in line with the legal expectations on a Students' Union in a publicly funded institution (A/SLQ/2, A/SLQ/3, A/SVL/4, A/AL/2). The representative structure is much used in support of (but not instigating) the enhancement interests of the students (A/SLQ/5, A/SLQ/6, A/SVL/1, A/SVL/2, A/SLLT/1). The student voice through representation is deemed to be strongly influential in terms of providing feedback and thereby influencing the strategic direction consequently set by the institution. *'...students' view was informed, ideologically sophisticated in a way we couldn't imagine at the times the students would be'* (A/SLQ/1).

A second structure that allows the student voice to be heard within the institution is the deliberate use of direct communication (A/SVL/7, A/AL/3). Students are encouraged to communicate their views and interests, including critiques, directly with staff, at any level of seniority. Notable practices were direct communication with teaching staff (A/SLQ/5), but also both impromptu and structured conversations with Deans (A/AL/3) and the Vice Chancellor: *'he sometimes invites the students for afternoon tea. I think he does it at the Savoy or something, so it's a good experience for the students to be invited to a free afternoon tea'* (A/SVL/6). The described events were reactive in nature at the higher levels (students were invited) and proactive at the lower levels –after due induction and role modelling.

The **governance structure** of Institution A is traditional with a separate Board of Directors which has ultimate oversight of the institution and is mostly made up of external members. Within the institution an Academic Council oversees all academic matters for which it delegates responsibilities to a range of specialist committees. The membership of all committees includes student representation (A/SLLT/3, A/SVL/8, A/SLQ/7, A/AL/5).

Unusually, elected student representatives become member of the major committees having been selected by senior institutional staff after making themselves available (A/AL/6). The active and unrestrained involvement of student representatives in governance events is proactively supported and encouraged (A/SLLT/4). The student voice is experienced as influential within the governance structure: *'we do treat student as very important in those roles'* (A/AL/7). Research participants noted how external members of boards and panels sometimes struggle with this: *'[the Auditor] sat through my School Board and afterwards he was very critical of me because I was involving the students too much ... but I mean I do use them a lot and I think it's valuable and they appreciate it enormously.'* (A/AL/8). *'I chair the Learning and Teaching Committee where we have four student representatives and we use them very, very heavily in the meeting. Something like Academic Council what I find is because it's being Chaired by an independent person from the sector they tend to have a slightly more traditional view that sort of students sort of sit in the corner and listen.'* (A/AL/11).

Much like the governance structure of the institution, its **quality assurance structure** is traditional in nature. The type of monitoring, review, development and approval mechanisms that are common in public institutions are also used here. Through representation, students are extensively involved and influential within the quality assurance structure (A/SLQ/9). In relation to curriculum development, students are

extensively involved, except when professional bodies are prescriptive about the curriculum (A/SLQ/9, A/SLQ/14).

There are two unusual aspects of the quality assurance mechanism. The first is the use of an annual student written submission, akin to the submission student representatives are expected to provide for external quality assurance and standards reviews: *'We write an annual student written submission. (...) the Vice Chancellor, has asked for us to write an annual one (...) it is all the students that come together to write it and [VC name] gives us a generous budget to have an away day so that we have two days away to be able to write it and to get all ideas from all the elective students that sit on the Board and Committees (...) It's a document I submit as a Member of Council. (...) the University have no involvement at all. (...) We can be as critical as necessary as long as we provide clear recommendations and the reason again being when we are reviewed in six years' time, or whenever the QA is, they don't care about the issues itself or per say, it's about how an institution responds to the issues. (...) [So that's quite a powerful mechanism you've got there?] Absolutely (...) it is very powerful in the sense that it is genuinely the Student Voice. (...) It's what the students have said, and we then work together to see how can we do it (...) without bringing more obstacles in.'* (A/SVL/12). The submission goes without prior institutional scrutiny to the Academic Council for consideration and is influential in setting the institution's development agenda. It is experienced by staff and students as evidence of the institution taking student feedback seriously (A/SLQ/12). This method represents student engagement in both quality assurance and quality enhancement.

The second unusual quality assurance structure is the highly prominent use of module evaluations. In traditional quality structures the use of module evaluations would not constitute a structure in itself. In this institution the student feedback from these evaluations influences teachers' future employment within the institution: *'we have extremely stringent student feedback mechanisms. We have end of module reviews (...) we would have student feedback that would occur three times over the course of a yearly period (...) if I'd scored four it would show me the position within the team (...) Very important. (...) Then we get another set of feedback around about February because students would've had some assessments in January, so they're more informed at that point how well prepared were they and that's very important obviously, and then we get the last set of data round about June, which is then given a more holistic overview of their experience and we're very accountable on those professional teaching teams, you know, really we have to be scoring fours and if we're not then people want to know why and I would say that is why we have such a strong frontline*

delivery in the classrooms because we do have stringent student feedback mechanisms (...) Well we work in very competitive teaching teams. I'd say that we recruit the best of the best and in order to survive [laughs] here you have to keep performing so staff become very driven. I think the downside is that some of the other tasks that we'd like to see staff doing go on the backburner because they are absolutely driven to make sure that they're getting the fives in that classroom, which is good in that it plays to our unique selling point, which is teaching excellence. Downside is that there are some Faculty then who are not as developed outside of the classroom.' (A/SLLT/5). The same respondent also explains what might happen if teaching satisfaction is not high: *'It's set in your appraisal that you're going to achieve a certain rating in your teaching and obviously that's how we market ourselves so we can't, we just can't keep hold of people who, you know, who cannot perform to a certain level in the classroom so there's normally a mutual understanding that it's not working out and those kind of staff move on and we tend to keep ... if you put those people who've been here a very long time it's, you know, the cream of the cream, those people scoring very high. Teaching is not an easy job'* (A/SLLT/6).

Students have some awareness of the role of module evaluations in HR management (A/SVL/11). Reference is made by the same research participant to the fact that this performance management of teaching quality relates to the for-profit nature of the institution.

In Institution A there is no clear **structure of enhancement** arrangements and activities. Instead a strong ethos of enhancement in other structures is evidenced, in particular in relation to governance (A/SLQ/15, A/SLQ/16, A/AL/14). The previously mentioned student written submission is one example of the institution seeking student input to enhancement. There are also incidental initiatives, informal working groups (A/AL/16) and many survey-based feedback mechanisms that lead to enhancement activity but are identified as quality assurance by the institution.

The **roles that students are perceived to have** in this institution are multivariate. In interviews reference is made to students as consumers (A/SLQ/17), partners (A/AL/19), stakeholders (A/AL/19), professionals (A/SVL/16 with specific reference to mature postgraduate students who are sponsored by employers) or 'just student'. There is no explicit institutional view on the relationship between institution and students (A/SVL/16), although there is evidence of ongoing discussions.

Some of the staff describe students strongly as consumers or customers, but explain how this is not a negative: *'the catchphrase here for them is customers (...) there's been a lot of arguments about whether using 'customers' is the right thing (...) it's a term that's positive and you know, we're serving the customer...'* (A/SQL/17). In relation to engagement by students specifically, this respondent notes: *'the term customer is not, it's not a proactive engagement so I think it's more like a client where the client has to do something. But also the partner element of it is very strong so it's really much more like 'you are a partner but the university's a senior partner in providing the mechanisms by which the student can achieve their goals'. (...) about partnership, it's more about students taking responsibility for their own learning and for engaging in a way that enables them to hit the outcomes that they want to hit. (...) so the students are partners because they're the ones paying the money, getting the benefit, so it's a personal benefit (...).* (A/SLQ/17).

An advantage for the institution that comes from treating the student –customer well is also identified: *'(...) you want them to be happy because they are our greatest advocates. They are paying us money. They expect a lot but when they go on and go into the wider world they will be the ones telling their friends, or telling their colleagues that they studied at [name of institution] and they will be the ones providing future students, so even as a business you want to make sure your customers are looked after. People would say it's a business'* (A/SVL/15). The same respondent also refers to a student view on this consumer role: *'I think the Dean of Academic Affairs asked that question (...) Do you see yourself as a customer or something else? The student said yeah that's absolutely fine. That's what we do see ourselves as. Customers that have a real view and we will criticise things. I don't think we see ourselves as students but as customers.'* (A/SVL/17).

The partnership notion which is referred to in policy and national debates is not strongly supported: *'I think that I'm using the word stakeholder there to recognise the fact that they have an enormous stake in what we do and the decisions that we make around education and therefore it is very important that they are involved and their perspective is sought and so on. I think ... I know when we were on our QAA Panel they use the word Partner very strongly in the literature. I don't ... in some ways they are Partners. I think that is true, but I don't think it would be true to say that it is a completely sort of equal relationship. I think, you know, we are running the University. There's no doubt about that. We are making the academic decisions and the strategic decisions and the commercial decisions, but culturally we see students as important people, whether that be just simply dealing with them around our buildings, or their view in a meeting, so I,*

you know, [name of institution] take students views very seriously and that's led from the top' (A/AL/19).

An important change in the role of students occurred when the institution recruited a different study body. Where originally student intake comprised of mature professionals with career related qualification interests, the institution now recruits a majority of first time full-time undergraduate students. This has led to a more involved engagement with students and a wider range of student roles in the institution (A/SLQ/18).

It is worth noting that in the discussion of the nature of the relationship between the institution and the students, there was no reference made during interviews to the collective view of students or student representatives on the desired nature of the relationship.

The student involvement in the structures as described above show the institution enables an active and involved approach to engaging students. The nature of the relationship is identified as a service approach with students receiving and feeding back on the educational service and the institution providing and developing the service provided. There is little evidence of co-production, instigation of enhancement activity or joint educational enhancement activity otherwise (Kay et al., 2012, Dunne and Owen, 2013).

4.1.1.2 Explanations for the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students.

In relation to the **student voice**, it appears that external causes (new regulation and scrutiny of quality and standards) were not the reason for the intended change towards elected representation and increased independence of the student representative body (A/SLQ/2, A/SLQ/3, A/SLV/4, A/AL/2). Instead, the institution had developed trust in the quality and relevance of the student voice and had become aware of the value of the student voice for enhancement purposes (A/SLQ/1, A/SLQ/6, A/AL/1, A/SVL/5). Both the latter causes appear to be driving the institution to develop a stronger independent student voice, thus increasing further the influence of the student voice in future.

The analysis of causes of the prevalence of direct communication practices suggests that institutional reward mechanisms support an active culture of enhancement for which direct communication is modelled by the leadership of the institution. There is some indication that for-profit mechanisms may be at play (A/SVL/6), with a competitive interest in encouraging enhancement following directly communicated

feedback on the student experience: *'their job security is built on their teaching ability and their teaching ability goes to care of the student, development of the student, understanding the student – so issues in the classroom, issues in delivery, issues in resourcing, that affect the students' ability to progress or their happiness with the course, are very quickly highlighted because they affect the individual directly.'* (A/SLQ/5). And *'So here are obvious commercial benefits as well'* (A/SVL/6).

Analysis of the pervasive **involvement of students in the governance** structure resulted in the identification of several potential causes and generative mechanisms. External mechanisms such as policy and institutional peer comparisons were mentioned by the research participants (A/AL/18, A/SLQ/18, A/SVL/15) but were not found to be major actual motivations. Instead, the interviews suggests that a growing trust in the quality of the student voice (A/SLQ/18) and an institutional ethos of direct collaboration between students and staff have developed within the institution. The trust in the quality of the student voice has been produced by the student voice mechanism itself, which is an important finding. It appears that a student voice structure may –under the right conditions- have the generative power to strengthen its own importance and relevance in an institution. In this case, external factors (such as quality and standards review, national policy development and conditions relating to acquiring Degree Awarding Powers) will have been supportive conditions, as are leadership ethos and an institutional drive to enhance the student learning experience. The latter is potentially driven by a for-profit environment.

The causes influencing **student involvement in quality assurance** are not dissimilar to those for student involvement in governance. The student voice is strongly trusted and perceived to be valuable (A/SLQ/18). However, an institutional interest in enhancement can also be identified, which becomes even more clear when considering the intensive use of module evaluations as a key element of the quality assurance structure in place. The module evaluations are described in interviews as not only part of quality assurance, but also of performance management and of institutional reputation management, specifically in a for-profit context which recognises competitive markets.

As stated previously, **student involvement in enhancement** takes a reactive role, with students feeding back on the student experience (A/SVL/12) rather than being involved or taking charge of implementing change. In this institution, students are selected for their constructive involvement in enhancement panels and reviews (A/SLQ/12, A/SLQ/13). This is a limitation on engagement of students in enhancement

which is not unusual within the wider sector (Van Der Velden et al., 2013a), although in most public institutions the enhancement drive is not necessarily as closely linked to for-profit considerations such as reputation management and market competition. One of the interviewees states: *'A lot of the stuff we do now is about enhancement, it's about competition, it's about looking elsewhere and seeing what other people are doing, it's looking at changes in policy and sectors. (A/SLQ/15)*, whilst another notes: *'you know, it's the old saying that, you know, the bride should choose their own wedding dress' (A/SLLT/9)*.

In this institution the structure of beliefs that influences how **the role of students** is perceived, holds within it some powerful causes for ongoing development of beliefs and values. Firstly, there is no explicit institutional stance on the matter, thus allowing and perhaps encouraging ongoing evaluation and debate regarding the involvement of students in a range of structures. The initial efforts to enable a change in the role of students towards active involvement in institutional governance, quality assurance and communication, came from an awareness that student engagement was encouraged by national discussions, strongly conflicting individual views within the institution and a resultant debate (A/SLQ/18). A further cause of change to the perceived role of students was the change of curriculum portfolio and consequent changes in the type of students recruited.

In this institution the drive for enhancement is a pervasive mechanism that causes the institution to actively engage with students. This mechanism has affected all of the earlier considered aspects of institutional engagement with students. However, in relation to the role of students in this institution, actual reference to enhancement is not made. Instead a relationship is described, in which the students receive a service (education) and the institution is responsible for service delivery. There is certainly reference to the stake that students have in this, both in terms of financial contribution and personal effort to succeed, but this is still in a service user and service delivery relationship. There is some direct reference to the business considerations by several of those interviewed (A/SVL/6, A/SLQ/15, A/SVL/15), yet that view is not held by all to the extent that students are being seen as consumers throughout the institution. It appears nonetheless that the for-profit ethos is connected to the enhancement mechanism.

If the connectivity between these two mechanisms is accepted, it then becomes necessary to explore their causal relationship. Logic suggests that it is more likely that a for-profit ethos generates a consequent interest in enhancement of the educational

provision, than that a strong interest in enhancement generates the for-profit approach of the institution. The ownership of the institution by a commercial company may be an antecedent which could further indicate the order of causality. A causal relationship whereby for-profit interests have generated enhancement mechanisms thus appears a valid assumption, but may or may not be entirely correct (noting the risk of a 'post hoc, ergo propter hoc' fallacy). There may be alternative or multiple causes for the strong enhancement ethos. It has previously been established that leadership mechanisms and national policy are also of influence. Until this causal relationship is repeated in other (for-profit or for-profit owned) institutions in the same way, some caution must be exercised with this interpretation.

4.2 Institution B – findings

At the time when the interviews and document research were undertaken, Institution B provided three undergraduate courses and three postgraduate courses in 2014/15 to an estimated 1800 students. The institution holds degree awarding powers and has University College status. The institution offers disciplines which are vocational and professional in nature.

Institution B is private, not-for-profit in nature and has developed as part of a professional accreditation body which is a charity.

4.2.1 Overview of findings for Institution B

This section consists of two sub-sections of findings, each related to one of the research questions. The first section intends to capture an overview of the ***methods of institutional engagement with students*** in Institution B. The second sub section evaluates the explanatory powers of the identified mechanisms across all Institution B findings, so as to infer ***what influences the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students.***

The full institutional profile of Institution B can be found in appendix 5.

4.2.1.1 *Methods of institutional engagement with students*

In institution B both student representation and surveys are used to hear **the student voice**. The extensive use of surveys (B/SVL/1, B/SVL/5, B/SVL/6, B/SVL/7 and B/SLQ/7) is recognised to be burdensome on students (B/SLQ/1, B/SLQ/3), and the institution is developing towards more representation methods of engagement.

This institution has no collective representative body for students, although some student-run societies are being established to offer social activities.

Student representatives are appointed rather than elected. Three types of student representation are in place. Firstly, there are class representatives who contribute to quarterly feedback meetings and raise issues throughout the year with an appointed Student Engagement Manager (B/VL/1, B/SLQ/6, B/SVL/3). A second group of representatives is selected and appointed after interview to represent students in governance arrangements (B/SLQ/5). Finally, Student Ambassadors are appointed, who represent the institution to prospective students. All representatives are overseen, supported and communicated with by the appointed Student Engagement Manager (B/SLQ/6). There are no elected student representatives and this is said to be due to failed election efforts in the past (B/SLQ/2, B/SLQ/5).

In this institution it is possible for student representatives to be appointed who represent all students associated with a particular employer who supports those students through their studies: *'some of our corporate customers, they will say 'oh yes, we'd like to have a student rep'. So, for example, one bank has a student rep that sits on one of our committees and they, dependent on the engagement of the student rep because they do vary, they've been quite engaged with representing their cohort'* (B/SLQ/3). It is worth noting that the institution is part of a professional accreditation body, which will have a pre-existing relationship with employers in the relevant sector. **Involvement of students in governance** is pervasive and influential (B/AL/5). The appointed student representatives are members of every major committee (B/AL/3, B/AL/6, B/SLQ/11) that relates to learning and teaching and the institution also has an appointed student member on their Board of Governors (B/SLQ/7). Efforts are made to ensure student representation from all levels and modes of study (B/SLQ/5) and the most senior Learning and Teaching Committee has a Student Enhancement agenda item as standard. Student representatives are deemed to be influential in committees, according to the research participants (B/AL/5). Student representatives are supported by the Student Engagement Manager but are also encouraged to take a Student Representative Advocacy module which has been developed and is delivered by the institution (B/AL/4) after other training had limited uptake (B/SLQ/3).

Student views and feedback are important in **the quality assurance** processes of Institution B and the emphasis here is on effective methods to consult students, rather than involve students in co-production or (curriculum) development. Students are asked to feed into processes through module and programme surveys and incidental

surveys when the institution requires additional feedback (B/SVL/4, B/SVL/6, B/AL/6, B/SLQ/9). Student representatives are consulted on enhancement proposals, curriculum developments (B/SLLT/3), new policy proposals and similar. When developing the institution's Students Charter, a co-production approach was taken.

There are some uncommon aspects to the quality assurance mechanisms in this institution. Staff Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs) are not used in this institution: *'...we tried a few years ago staff student liaison committees because that's what the sector said so we thought we should. However, bearing in mind that the vast majority of our students are at a distance, studying, distance learning and in full-time employment it didn't work.'* (B/SLLT/2). Instead, unit and programme evaluations are extensively used and the institution has instigated a Student Experience Group which is not part of the formal governance structure, where monitoring of the student experience as well as enhancement and development projects are initiated (B/SVL/4). This group takes on some of the functions of an SSLC although it is a cross-institutional grouping. It has a dual assurance and enhancement function.

In relation to curriculum development, student engagement is also reactive: *'we have a programme team that's there to develop the new programme and that's made up of (...) academic staff too and also external experts, either from other higher education institutions or from industry or both. And once that programme has been pretty much shaped what we try to do is run that past a group of students'* (B/SLLT/3).

Student involvement in enhancement is limited as enhancement is mostly staff led, with research participants remarking that it is their responsibility to provide a strong educational experience. Some enhancement takes place through the quality assurance structure rather than as separate enhancement activity (B/SVL/8, B/SLQ/8, B/SLLT/3). Although few, there are some examples where co-development of an enhancement has taken place (B/SVL/11, B/AL/9). A Student Engagement Week is being introduced which is a staff led enhancement activity for students, aimed at engaging students with personal and professional development opportunities as well as gathering feedback: *'... opportunities for us to be able to get a feedback and collect information on their student experience but also for them to have some fun as students. (...) We're going to have representatives from the various societies who have now been recognised by the institution and they're going to be able to promote themselves as a society and start to speak to their fellow students about joining their organisations another day, so the idea behind student engagement week is there is a different theme for each day focused on student engagement so we're going to have an employability focus where we're going*

to be running some internship, prep and CV writing seminars and various things along those lines and so really the week is just focused on academic professional and personal development for the students.' (B/SVL/10).

In summary, the methods used for enhancement of the student experience is mostly staff led and feedback focused, but changes are underway, most significantly illustrated by the appointment of a Student Engagement Manager.

The perceived role of students within the institution could be summarised as that of stakeholders (B/AL/10, B/SLQ/12) or partners (B/SLLT/7, B/AL/10, B/SVL/12). Research participants object to the notion of students as consumers (B/SLLT/6, B/AL/10, B/SVL/12). One participant stated: *'A stakeholder is somebody who's engaged with us. A consumer is somebody who goes into a shop, buys something and walks out again. And you see we have quite a strong alumni as well of students who then – and this goes back to our professional body roots which I don't think we should lose sight of – but they come back and they'll stay a member with us, a member of our professional body.'* (B/SLQ/12).

Research participants indicate that the institution aims to provide the best possible educational service to their students, who are seen as engaging long term with the institution, including engagement well after their studies (B/SVL/12, B/SLQ/13, B/AL/12, B/SLLT/4). The long term engagement with students relates to the professional body organisation that the institution is rooted in (B/AL/13, B/SLQ/12). During their studies the stake holding students who have invested in their education, will feedback on and be consulted on their educational experiences, so that the institution can address any shortcomings or enhance the educational offer (B/AL/10, B/SLLT/6, B/SVL/12). This could be understood as an educational service relationship, with a consequent stakeholder role for students.

The institution recognises that it does not have the same methods of engagement with students that publicly funded institutions have, although it tries to emulate these (B/AL/14). The differences identified by research participants include the lack of involvement in the NSS which would create a (prospective) student information advantage (B/SVL/13), and also the absence of a students' union which research participants recognise would change the nature of representation considerably (B/SLQ/4).

4.2.1.2 Explanations for the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students.

More than one explanation can be found for the institutional engagement with students that is particular to this institution. Here, the approach to institutional engagement with students is institutionally managed and focuses on assuring and enhancing educational service delivery through consultation and feedback from students who are regarded as stakeholders. One research participant notes: *'It's just an ethos of wanting to provide the best possible service to the students and therefore by allowing them a voice you can enhance what you do.'* (B/SLLT/4). This ethos influences both the manner in which **the student voice** is heard and **the involvement of students in governance**.

Whilst external influences such as comparison with publicly funded institutions, policy drivers and external review recommendations (B/SLQ/4, B/SLQ/2, B/SLQ/5) have steered this institution towards consideration of an elected student representative body, the institution has had prior experience of failure with that approach (B/SLQ/2, B/SLQ/5). Institutional memory therefore inhibits change in that direction. Moreover, research participants have reservations about the appropriateness of engagement with the student voice: *'[what] we don't want to do is run away with ourselves in terms of student power if you like in terms of just thinking well, the way to deliver student power is just to give them the keys to the kingdom as opposed to saying 'the way to deliver real student power is to ensure that the kingdom is built in a way that delivers for the student''* (B/AL/1). This may explain why the student representation system is strongly controlled by staff, as illustrated by the appointed leader for the representation system, the lack of an independent student body and the appointed nature of student representatives.

The institution recognises that changes in its student body are occurring due to changes in recruitment patterns. The institution now provides educational provision for different types of students, ranging from employed students engaged in CPD, to fulltime undergraduate students and part-time, mature and employed postgraduates. Over recent years the balance between these student groups appears to have changed and this is generating new developments in the methods of institutional engagement with students. Most notably, a Student Engagement Manager has been appointed to respond to increased student engagement needs, who is introducing new approaches to student engagement (B/SLQ/6). However, the ability to appoint student representatives is still felt to be effective and no change towards elected representation is planned to take place.

In relation to engaging **students in quality assurance and enhancement**, one of the research participants notes: *'Now, when it comes to development of curriculum and things of that nature I think it should be left to academics with the constant involvement of students in the sense of running those module level surveys and programme level surveys such as feedback to the developers of curriculum and using that student voice in the process of development.'* (B/SVL/7). This statement towards staff ownership of the curriculum may explain why student involvement in quality assurance is mostly consultative. Nonetheless, students are acknowledged to have *'an absolute right to know that our quality control measures, even down to moderation and how we deal with extenuating circumstances and special considerations, are A1 and fully relevant and appropriate. But I wouldn't say that they were partners in developing that, I'd say that they were complete stakeholders because it's their job to say 'right, how are you doing this?' or 'this is what we feel we need' and 'how are you doing it?' and 'we approve' or 'we disapprove' or whatever.'* (B/AL/10). The service delivery ethos of the institution is again illustrated in this aspect of institutional engagement with students.

Institution B perceives **the role of students** as stakeholders, but also recognises other stakeholders, such as the employers of groups of students and this is reflected in some of the representation arrangements (B/SLQ/3). Moreover, the overarching organisation is a professional body, which engages with professionals from their early professional studies, through accreditation and onto ongoing recognition as professionals during their career. It provides services for individual professionals, groups of students and employers in the relevant sector. This long-term engagement perspective means that students within the institution are not only engaging with their institution but also their long term professional accreditors. As a result, the role of students in this institution is strongly perceived as prospective professionals and long-term stakeholders in the organisation. Additionally, the service delivering nature of the professional body is reflected in the ethos of engagement with students within the institution. In that sense, the ethos is institution-centric, arranging the methods used to enable the student voice to have influence in a manner that is designed, managed and controlled by the institution.

In summary then, influential generative mechanisms within this institution are the service delivery nature of the overarching organisation which engages with learners over many years, the changing nature of the student body and the institutional memory of previous failed efforts to engage with students using methods more common to publicly funded institutions.

4.3 Institution C – findings

Institution C is a small, very new institution (at the time of interview) in its second year of delivering HE programmes. It offers seven undergraduate degrees and had just under 150 students at the time of interview. The institution offers professional and vocational degrees, including foundation degree and top-up routes.

The institution is not-for-profit, owned by a for-profit company (FTSE 100, multinational).

4.3.1 Overview of findings for Institution C

This section consists of two sub-sections of findings, each related to one of the research questions. The first section intends to capture an overview of the ***methods of institutional engagement with students*** in Institution C. The second sub-section evaluates the explanatory powers of the identified mechanisms across all Institution C findings, so as to infer ***what influences the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students***.

The full institutional profile of Institution C can be found in appendix 6.

4.3.1.1 *Methods of institutional engagement with students*

The student voice in Institution C is direct and informal (C/SVL/1, C/SLLT/1, C/SVL/3) due to the size and early stage of existence of the institution. In structural terms the institution relies on formal student representation (C/AL/1, C/SLLT/4) and the appointment of students in a co-producers role, who are called 'co-creators' (C/AL/2, C/SLQ/1, C/SLLT/2, C/SLLT/3, C/SVL/4).

Both co-creators and student representatives have a representing function in relation to academic matters, but whilst representatives are elected (C/SQL/2, C/SLQ/3), co-creators are selected as part of a scholarship application scheme, whereby candidates for a scholarship are selected on academic ability. Out of this group, the institution selects candidates it deems suitable for the co-creators role (C/SLQ/1). Their fees are waived as remuneration for the role (C/AL/2). The co-creator role is both developmental and ambassadorial: *'one strand is in terms of informing future students of what it's like to be a student at [name] and they do that through different ways, and the other strand which used to be like a student rep is now actually working on research projects in areas that we would like as a college to [develop and enhance]'* (C/SLQ/8).

Due to the small size and newness of the institution, **governance** structures in this institution are limited but are expected to grow (C/SLQ/4). Student representatives are members of all committees and research participants also note student membership on panels and groups that are not part of formal governance (C/SLQ/5, C/SLLT/3), partly due to self-declared student interest: *'just a range of students who ... showed an interest in joining and they were therefore invited to join the committee last year.'* (C/AL/4). Unusually, the institution also intends to invite students onto their Planning Committee: *'we have decided we're going to have students along to two of those a year so when we're looking at the overall plan of where we're going and getting some student input into that.'* (C/SLLT/3). However, the research participants acknowledge that influence through governance is limited, whilst the co-creators are more influential, particularly as the institution is developing itself: *'the concept of being a co-creator is also an element of what I'm talking about so that they help us shape what the student experience should be like (...) So some of these things not everyone knows about yet but we're putting them in place and as we grow and develop the students will actually help shape it.'* (C/SLLT/2).

Quality assurance is in its early stages in this new institution. Staff-student liaison committees and separate unit evaluations do not exist, but feedback from programme surveys and representatives is considered in a Board where student representatives hold membership (C/AL/4, C/SLLT/4). Teaching evaluations are known to lead to staff performance management where this is deemed to be appropriate. The institution has introduced student appraisals where student progress as well as feedback on the student experience is covered. Students' involvement in quality assurance is considerable in relation to curriculum development with students involved alongside employers and staff on 'degree concept teams'.

The institution's interest in involving students in developing the institution is also borne out in **student involvement in enhancement**. Co-creators are appointed to support enhancement projects such as developing time tabling apps (C/SLLT/6) and the development of an apprenticeship scheme (C/SLLT/7). Several of these developments are spontaneous and instigated by students (C/SLQ/7, C/SLQ/9, C/SLLT/6).

Beyond such project work, direct communication also drives change: *'Much enhancement is driven by ongoing, informal contact with the leadership of the College, and in particular the Dean. This ensures for improvements to be made in an immediate and ad hoc manner where required.'* (C/SVL/3).

In institution C **the perceived role of students** within the organisation is a combination of customers, partners or in one case, clients (C/AL/5, C/SLQ/10, C/AL/7, C/SVL/4): *'... undoubtedly that customer element, but it's more than that, it's...and partner I guess is probably the closest thing to it. We do actively involve our students in decisions that are taken here and as a body I'd like to think anyway that they feel that they had a strong input into the....into life at [institution name]. So I mean we as a [institution] deem them very much as a partner....'* (C/AL/5).

As set out previously, the institutional leadership intentionally creates opportunities for students to help create the future student experience, organisation and structure of the institution through the appointment of co-creators. Other students can also contribute to building the future shape of the institution: *'Well I guess we see students as our customers and it would make sense for your customers to be heard and listened to when defining the experience. (...) the students are amazing, you know, the initiatives they drive and the things they're doing. I guess all we can really do is give them the flexibility and the support and resources to do them. I really think they've bought into this idea that we are essentially, ourselves, a start-up and we are a very big (...) umbrella, but we are a start-up and we are creating something from scratch and the students that come here, they understand that that's the situation, they understand that we're young and we're developing. I think they're quite attracted by the opportunity to have a say in the development of [the College] (...) there's definitely an entrepreneurial flair to our students.'* (C/SLQ/10). The motivation for this role is the drive to engage students in an entrepreneurial experience, preparing them for what the leadership described as *'what the modern world might look like'* (C/SLLT/8). *'My ideal world would be that every cohort of students would contribute something to the shape of the university as it grows'* (C/SLLT/9). Underpinning this entrepreneurial ethos is an interest in developing a unique style of university (*'boutique'* C/SLLT/8).

In most institutions the role of students is defined in relation to the role of staff within that institution. In this case though, there is a tripartite approach: *'... the student voice runs centrally through our philosophy and what we do. We specialise I guess in industry engagement, but we see it very much as a three way approach between students, academics and industry.'* (C/AL/6). This approach is strongly represented throughout the interviews (C/SLLT/9, C/SLLT/10).

In summary then, the role of students in institution C is entrepreneurial with clear elements of consumers of the educational experiences provided and partners in developing the future educational provision of the institution.

4.3.1.2 Explanations for the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students.

The arrangements for **the student voice** to be heard by the institution appear to have been generated in a context of a very new institution with limited governance and self-determination. Whilst in the early stages of their existence, institutions cannot obtain degree awarding powers and are therefore subject to the quality and student engagement mechanisms expected by the validating partner institutions. In this institution this has not led to an emulation of 'common' student engagement practices, other than in the elected representative system (C/SLQ/3). Instead, the Vice Chancellor of Institution C projects strong leadership towards an ethos of entrepreneurialism and developmental partnership with students which is consequently reflected in the student voice arrangements which are closely related to **the perceived role of students** in this institution. Much emphasis is placed on the contributions made by appointed student co-creators and other students who are partners in the establishment of the institution's future educational provision: *'It's to sort of question really what a university needs to look like and what it's trying to achieve and if you really want to have a community of people which is the traditional idea of university is very much around an academic community. These days actually you have tens of thousands of students who just follow the regulations and do what they're told and sit their assessments and that kind of stuff. So we're very small and in the UK at least I imagine that we'll probably always be a sort of boutique university if you like. So there's an opportunity there for the students themselves to really shape it and when you look at pedagogy (...) and the different amounts that you learn, sitting and listening to lectures is one of the least effective methods and the most effective and the person who learns the most in the classroom at any one time is the teacher. So the more that we can put students into the role of actually designing and being responsible for their own learning and helping other people and all that kind of stuff, the more that they do that, the more that they'll actually learn and hopefully they'll also be really creative and will create a university that's not like everyone else and is perhaps more equipped for what the modern world might look like. So that's really the reason behind it.'* (C/SLLT/8).

The Vice Chancellor leads on achieving this ethos very strongly and research participants refer to their leadership on this approach. This is partly a pedagogical ethos, but there is suggestion that there is also an interest from the company that owns Institution C: *'So the company, because it's an education company it's very interested in the students' opinions so sometimes there's certain things – it could be a consultation document or something – that we're looking at that someone in the company might be interested in talking to some of the students, which is great for the*

students.' (C/SLLT/11) and *'they should be contributing, not just to the college, they should be contributing to the company because they are part of the company and to the commercial professional world.'* (C/SLLT/7). Whilst the institution is not-for-profit, a longer-term interest in commercial potential is not excluded: *'there are expectations that we will reach a certain size by a certain date and that that therefore comes with a certain amount of revenue but remember we're set up as a 'not-for-profit' so the plan is that when we eventually get degree awarding powers and university title we might stay 'not-for-profit' as a university but then we might create some 'for-profit' entities and validation services and stuff like that.'* (C/SLLT/12). The commercial ownership of this institution is therefore understood to have some influence on the entrepreneurial nature of engagement with students.

The encouragement of an entrepreneurial partnership with students is reflected in the way the institution engages with **students on governance, quality assurance and enhancement** activity, which are strongly interlinked in Institution C. Students who have shown an interest in joining governance committees are given membership (C/AL/4, C/SLLT/3). Appointed co-producers (students) are leading or taking part in enhancement projects (C/SLQ/7, C/SLQ/9, C/SLLT/6, C/SLLT/7) and involvement of students in quality assurance is organised more strongly in governance terms than by the use of traditional quality mechanisms. Staff student liaison committees and unit evaluations are not used and the emphasis on evaluation lies at institutional (committee) level rather than discipline level. This suggests either a desire for strong central oversight, or a preference for collective cross-disciplinary evaluation; however which of these is the motivating factor is not clear from interviews.

In summary, Institution C showed little reference to external influence (beyond that of the owning company) such as the QAA, validating partners or comparison to peer institutions. Instead the main generative mechanism that shapes student involvement in the five aspects of institutional engagement with students, is the institution's interest in developing an entrepreneurial partnership with students aimed at developing a strong and unique identity for the institution.

4.4 Institution D – findings

At the time when the interviews and document research were undertaken, Institution D offered degree courses at sub-degree, undergraduate and post-graduate level. Having previously depended strongly on international student recruitment, student numbers have dropped from 2900 students in 2011, 1416 in 2012, 870 in 2013 to only 336 in

2014. The institution covers disciplines that are professional and vocational in nature. The institution does not hold degree awarding powers.

Institution D is a UK owned private for-profit provider.

4.4.1 Overview of findings for Institution D

This section consists of two-sub sections of findings, each related to one of the research questions. The first section intends to capture an overview of the ***methods of institutional engagement with students*** in Institution D. The second sub-section evaluates the explanatory powers of the identified mechanisms across all Institution D findings, so as to infer ***what influences the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students.***

The full institutional profile of Institution D can be found in appendix 7.

4.4.1.1 Methods of institutional engagement with students

Research participants in Institution D recognise two main structures for ensuring the **Student Voice** is being heard. One is through surveys (D/SLLT/1, D/SLQ/4, D/SVL/2, D/SLLT/8, D/SLQ/6) and the other is the establishment of a representative structure which, at the time of the study, was undergoing change (D/AL/1, D/SLQ/1, D/SLLT/2, D/SLLT/4). There is also reference to informal methods: *'I think it's probably because we try our best to engage our students as far as we can, not necessarily always formally, very much informal, wherever the opportunity arises, but yeah, we are, it is probably because of our size that it's easier to deal with things informally and it's quicker to deal with things informally, than it would be in a big institution.'* (D/SLLT/1).

Student representatives are elected (D/AL/1, D/SLQ/1, D/SLLT/3) for the duration of their studies. Elected representatives collectively form the Student Council (D/SLQ/1, D/SLLT/2) which is overseen by a senior member of staff who mediates communications between the institution and the representatives: *'So I'm the one who provides the student, course representative training, I am the one who meets with the student council, who listens to their feedback and then I feed that back to my colleagues on the senior management team and implement whatever needs to be implemented and then feed back to the student council on the changes or how their requests were listened to and then how we acted on that.'* (D/SLLT/2).

The Student Council has a strongly consultative role and may appear in function akin to a focus group, but there is awareness by research participants of the institutional

interest in finding consensus between staff and students or at least acceptance by students of the institutional stance: *“we would look at it again and we would try and find a compromise position but at the end of the day if I say to them that there are certain academic regulations that we have to comply with so we don’t have a completely free hand. They do recognise that (...) it is a reasonable student voice and if it was unreasonable I would tell them that they were being unreasonable and/or the principal would ... we would say as much as we might like to be able to do that with you, it is not possible.”* (D/SLQ/3).

Students are involved in the governance of the institution through inclusion of student representatives on some committees, but not all. The staff intermediary states: *‘so where the students aren’t represented, like for instance the curriculum management group or the senior management team, and I always tell the students that I then step into their shoes. So even though it’s a thing that I wouldn’t necessarily agree with, I would still take the message to the senior management group or the curriculum management, on behalf of the students, and tell the conversation with the students.’* (D/SLLT/6).

The surveys are a key part of **the quality assurance structure**. The use of surveys is noted to be extensive, with one reference made to *‘Extremely, extremely important. Like most institutions, we border on (...) over surveying, (...) the first time they would give a feedback (...) is the day that they enrol with us, then after that, would be the end of induction, and then after that, half way through the first term our academic staff will do informal feedback with the students, and then after that, at the end of every term, and the end of every unit we do feedback with the students, and that feedback gets fed back into our lecturer end of term reports and that then goes back to the course manager’s report and that goes back to the [Institutional Monitoring and Evaluation Reports]. So we do look at the feedback.’* (D/SLLT/4). *‘It’s analysed by group. It is then analysed by course and we can actually then look at it by year or by whole groups. They are looked at first and foremost as part of the course manager’s termly report and both termly reports come to something called curriculum management group, which I check. (...) I see every single one of them so as the academic director have oversight of the student learning experience and that’s on the formal side.’* (D/SLQ/4). In this institution the research participants did not make reference to the use of student feedback for staff performance management. However, the Student Voice Leader (a student) did suggest the institution takes these surveys seriously and is likely to follow up with staff, but does not know how this is done (D/SVL/3). Staff interviewed for the research did not share any comments on this aspect.

The surveys themselves are also subject to student feedback: *'in terms of our feedback, with my next student council meeting, I'm going to put our current feedback surveys to the council and ask them for their input into our surveys. I mean, it's not just the kind of things that we ask from students, in terms of our feedback, whether that's the kind of things that they would want us to ask. So I'm going to give the students the opportunity to, not redesign our feedback but to tell us the things that they would like us to monitor.'* (D/SLLT/8).

In the context of quality assurance one research participant refers also to student involvement in course design (D/SVL/4) whilst the only student interviewed underlined how he is aware of the emphasis the institution puts on the judgment by the QAA particularly: *'every single meeting that we've attended not a single meeting has gone by without discussing QAA in there. We've had visits as well from QAA where they have spoken with me as well as some other students about our learning experience and we have given them our first-hand experience as to what we've experienced in this particular organisation.'* (D/SVL/4). The same research participant also refers to the institution being a learning provider for other institutions (being a franchised/ validated partner) and the need to meet those institutions' quality assurance requirements.

The institution does not hold staff-student liaison committees. Instead, student feedback is considered at a course board, where one student representative is a member of the board otherwise made up of *'all academic staff, admin staff, academic management staff'* which the research participant regards as *'similar to a staff student liaison committee'*. (D/SLLT/5).

Student involvement in enhancement is limited in Institution D. Influence is indirect, through various forms of feedback: *'surveys, through forums, through work with the student council, those are the three ways and through looking at the cumulative student feedback.'* (D/SLQ/6). Students view enhancement as a matter for the institution: *'Obviously the institution has their own programme that they need to deliver to and they need to constantly be looking to make inroads into improving their learning systems and procedure that they have. Now they can't just simply rely on what students say because otherwise they'd be laying various different formats throughout the year upon recommendation from term to term basis.'* (D/SVL/6).

Enhancement activities as described in interviews are transactional, such as classroom quality (D/SVL/3) or assessment timing (D/SLQ/8), but feedback driven enhancement can equally be transformational, including support for disabled students (D/SLLT/10)

and presentation skills development (D/SVL/5). However, there does not appear to be a wide range of enhancement activity beyond these listed here and students are not involved in the development of improved practices.

In institution D **the role that students are perceived to have** is multifarious and there is no institutionally agreed view reported by research participants. Although the role of customer is a recurring theme in interviews (D/SLQ/7, D/SLQ/9), there is also reference to stakeholder and client roles (D/SLQ/8, D/AL/3, D/SVL/7), and the latter view was held by the wider range of research participants. Other references were also made, especially in relation to the type of international students the institution used to recruit. The international students who tended to come from non-western cultures engaged with the institution not only in relation to academic opportunities for learning, but also in relation to social and visa related needs, which led one of the research participants to describe the relationship as *'family'* (D/AL/3).

As one research participant set out in some detail, the nature of the student body and therefore their role has changed considerably: *'our tier four international students were more aware of the cost of their course than our UK and EU students are. Because our UK and EU students all study (...) I don't think they have got that same demand in terms of, we are paying so much money for this and therefore you need to give into our word (...) I think our tier four students were much more aware of the amount of money that they paid for their courses (...) Our local students actually pay more slightly, than our tier four students would have in the past, but because it's a loan and because we feel the impact of the money spent immediately, they're not so much aware of that, and they don't really come to me and say, oh well, I have paid this much for my course, therefore you need to do this, that and the other for me, okay? So from a, yeah, from that point of view, it's exactly the opposite way than you would have expected it to go. (...) if you also look at the demographics of our students, in terms of age and background and those kind of things, I think very many of them are of the opinion that it's very unlikely that they'll ever pay the loan back, because of age sometimes. We've got students who are somewhere within their 60's. They've not going to pay it back because after studying they're going to go back onto either state pension or something like that and then, or benefits, and then they'll never earn the required £21,000 to pay it back. So I think for very many of them, they don't feel the impact of the loan, ultimately. With regards to how we see our students, we definitely see them as partners, not just as a client or a customer'* (D/SLLT/11).

4.4.1.2 Explanations for the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students.

This institution is experiencing exceptional circumstances; it has been halved in size annually for three successive years, has consequently lost many staff and needs to accept considerable changes in curriculum portfolio, student intake and academic practices.

In terms of this research study, it was expected that due to this level of change, research participants might compare earlier student engagement practices with current and changed practices. The situation was expected to potentially provide a 'critical incident' situation, but it became clear that Institution D had only recently introduced structures that allow **the student voice** to be heard. Therefore little comparison with an earlier context could be made. It is nonetheless possible that the changes undergone by the institution might have generated the development of a structural student voice approach, in that the intake of a different student body is likely to generate new methods of engagement with the student voice. To some extent this appeared to be the case.

Previously, the institution recruited self-funded international (overseas) students who were greatly dependent on their institution in social, educational and visa status terms: *with regards to tier four students, because they were, they were only allowed in the country because they were studying with a provider, they were very, how can I say? Without sounding too crude, they were easily controllable. (...) they had to be very loyal and they had to follow our rules and they had to do what the college required of them to be able to stay in the country, and my experiences in the past, if you mention something to them like for instance, sorry, we can't deal with this request because it's just not possible for us, they will accept that, whereas with the UK and EU market, they are slightly more demanding and they won't just take no for an answer, and because there is no real thing, tied into you, if they want to leave, they can just leave. They are less [tied]. Yes, so they are, it's very difficult to, I think, manage the attendance of students, of local UK and EU students. Because, I mean on a tier four, they are all, by law, required to attend x number of classes, whereas with UK and EU students, they aren't. So to motivate the students to actually be in attendance sometimes is really a difficult thing to do, because there's no carrot and a stick approach with them, I mean if they don't want to come, they just don't come and that's, there's nothing really you can do about it.'* (D/SLLT/10). This quote clearly illustrates how not the change in size, but the change in nature of the student body has generated a new context for developing student engagement methods.

Another important factor that is influencing the development of student engagement mechanisms within the institution appears to be strong individual leadership: *'So at our next meeting, which will be coming up in a week or two, we would be then electing our president, and then my aim would be to work with that person to get the student council to be more independent, and instead of me inviting them to meetings, for them to be calling their own meetings and inviting me as an independent person to come and sit in their meetings and get their feedback. (...) it's, well because that is part of my responsibilities, it's driven by myself. We haven't had any meeting or anything like that where it was said we need to get our student council to be more independent, but looking at, I think looking at the way that a student union would normally operate, that's something that I would, with my hat on, would try and aim for. Now I know it's a very long journey still, to get that independence (...) So decisions can get taken on an individual basis, rather than on a group or a management basis. It's something that I would have fed back to my colleagues on the senior management team in any case, that this is my aim, and they agreed with that, so it is driven by just myself. (...) I think for us, to get a proper independent voice from our students, I think for me though, to have them work as an individual body would be ideal, probably because that's what I'm used to and that's what I've seen from other student's unions. It might just be that I am trying to get something off my shoulders, to offload some of my duties. (...) it's not a request that was ever voiced by the students, if I could put it like that. But then again, what I've found with that is if you don't nurture them in a certain direction, they're never going to make that decision themselves anyway.'* (D/SLLT/3).

As a third influence on institutional engagement with students, the institution recognises how external expectations are changing and how this changes the way students are engaged: *'our review method from the QAA has changed, changing now, I think there's going to be a lot more scope for student participation in our quality assurance, and all the three areas that we have within the quality [code]. So I think, going forward, there's going to be, we are going to try and depend more, well not depend, encourage students to be more engaged with the development and strategy and those kind of things, and I think it's purely because of the new (...) review methodology that we're going to have to do that.'* (D/SLLT/13).

This intention is contrary to the current arrangements, as the institution's student representative system is small with approximately 15 representative students covering all courses, and representatives having limited involvement in **governance** and **quality assurance** or **enhancement activity**. The students' contribution is mostly discussed as reactive. The underlying approach taken in this institution is of service provider

whereby students, described as having a client/ stakeholder role (D/SLQ/8, D/SVL/1), provide feedback so that services can be improved. Whilst a service provider ethos may explain the consultative approach, there is also a lack of confidence in the student voice: *'we still have, we have our channels where we, yes, I have to encourage the voice, in certain aspects, yes. So if it's, there's still room for development in the student voice (...) Yeah, we give them the opportunities to raise their voice, but I mean we try and give them opportunity after opportunity, because that's always come out in the first instance, so you have to poke at them slightly sometimes, yes, to get their opinion out.'* (D/SLLT/7).

The combination of the changing student body, external expectations and active implementation of leadership views generate a context in which the representative system is undergoing considerable redevelopment towards independence from staff and the institution (D/SLLT/3). This is likely to affect governance involvement and ultimately quality assurance and enhancement as well.

The perception of the role of the student is also changing. Since the more recent student cohort is no longer dependent on the institution for visa purposes, a more demanding approach might be expected. One research participant, however, expects a less consumerist relationship to develop: *'our tier four international students were more aware of the cost of their course than our UK and EU students are. (...) Our local students actually pay more slightly, than our tier four students would have in the past, but because it's a loan (...) they're not so much aware of that, and they don't really come to me and say, oh well, I have paid this much for my course, therefore you need to do this, that and the other for me, okay? So from a, yeah, from that point of view, it's exactly the opposite way than you would have expected it to go.'* (D/SLLT/11).

Despite the for-profit nature of the institution, there is little evidence of commercial considerations being made in the academic context. One of the research participants point out that the Board may think of students as consumers within the Institution, but the Board members have no influence or engagement with the academic processes (D/SLQ/9). Ownership influence in this institution therefore appears limited.

In summary, three generative mechanisms influence the current and planned development of institutional engagement with the student voice in Institution D. Firstly, external policy expectations are noted as a driver towards increased engagement of students in a wider range of institutional processes. Secondly, individual leadership by the senior member of staff who takes responsibility for the engagement agenda is

aimed at establishing an independent, influential student representative body, akin to students' unions in other institutions. Finally, the student body itself is undergoing considerable change from a student body which has a social, academic and visa related dependent relationship with the institution, to a student body which is only academically dependent on the institution. This changes the power relations between the institution and the students it wishes to engage with, although the institution recognises that this does not lead to straightforward consumerist behaviours.

In this institution, there is little evidence of influence from the owners of the institution.

4.5 Institution E – findings

At the time of interview, Institution E reported having four thousand students on more than ten undergraduate and ten postgraduate programmes across a wide range of humanities, social sciences and finance disciplines.

The institution is a not-for-profit organisation and has acquired taught degree awarding powers and University status in recent years. The University charges at the higher end of the fees scale with the majority of students paying £14,000 per annum.

4.5.1 Overview of findings for Institution E

This section consists of two sub-sections of findings, each related to one of the research questions. The first section intends to capture an overview of the ***methods of institutional engagement with students*** in Institution E. The second sub-section evaluates the explanatory powers of the identified mechanisms across all Institution E findings, so as to infer ***what influences the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students***.

The full institutional profile of Institution E can be found in appendix 8.

4.5.1.1 *Methods of institutional engagement with students*

Institution E has a well organised structure in place for **the student voice** in the form of an institutional Students' Union and seven Student Councils for each of the seven schools within the institution. Roles within the school councils are held partly by elected representatives (president, vice president and treasurer) and partly by student-appointed students (E/SVL/1). All students are automatically enrolled into the Students' Union which is led by elected representatives only (E/SLQ/1). Not all courses have an elected representative in this system (E/SVL/1) and this is a recognised issue. The Students' Union itself is looking for greater independence from the institution (E/SVL/2) and shortly the first sabbatical officer (SU President) will be introduced (E/SVL/3).

Alongside the formal representation arrangements, informal communication directly between staff and students is also valued (E/AL/2).

Student involvement in governance is pervasive in Institution E with student representatives participating in Senate, its committees and at discipline level (E/AL/4, E/SLLT/4, E/SLLT/5, E/AL/3). Students are trained and supported for governance roles (E/SLQ/3, E/SVL/4) although there are concerns about the effectiveness of training (E/SLLT/6). Students are not part of the University's Directorate, but do take part in working groups that inform strategic direction (E/SLQ/4). Whilst student representative involvement levels are high, there are distinct concerns about the effectiveness of the student voice and how sophisticated it can be considering annual changeovers of representatives (E/SLLT/7). Other research participants are more positive and describe the student representative voice as very able: that *'they definitely have a voice. Absolutely they do. They are very confident. The students are very confident. I think they generally enjoy attending. They are treated very well by other members of staff. They're treated as equals. They are asked for their opinion. They will offer their opinion even if not asked. We have the option of asking them to leave if there are things that are inappropriate. So, for example...HR matters or finance matters, those sort of things. But I've not actually seen it happen in practice.'* (E/AL/5).

There are also indications that the student voice is informed and respected as described by the Student Voice Leader (a student, elected as President of SU): *'I think people within the university very much respect the students' opinion because at the end of the day we're obviously the most important thing within the university so you know all our officers are trained, they are usually people who are not scared to talk about certain topics or express their opinions (...) so yeah that's obviously part of the selection process that those people are confident in an environment where they need to speak up...and mostly what we try to prepare them for or how we prepare them is a very I think normal way, we just try – every argument we try to have a good line of argument with enough backing, enough evidence, critical mass, relevance, so it's never...an officer will never go into a meeting unprepared or uninformed or expressing an individual opinion. So everything we present is backed by some kind of data or whatever we have so that...we just try to take it as seriously as possible and I think the people who are working, so the staff at the university, they respect that and they are actually very willing to listen, yeah. Obviously there's politics and sometimes you feel in a position where you can't do as much as you want which is I think normal and natural, but I haven't come across major issues with regards to that yet.'* (E/SVL/4).

Student involvement in quality assurance is present in all stages and levels of quality assurance. Students provide feedback through unit surveys (E/SLLT/8, E/AL/6) but are also involved in the evaluation of these and more broadly the evaluation of annual monitoring (E/SVL/6, E/AL/7), and also in programme revalidations and programme redesign (E/SLLT/10, E/AL/8, E/SVL/7). Student survey feedback is connected to HR management and reward (E/SLLT/9). Staff student liaison committees also occur (E/SLQ/5), but these are once a year events and are not much valued due to their transactional nature.

The student voice in quality assurance is well received and some research participants shared their intentions to use the student voice more for satisfaction related institutional action planning (E/SLLT/11, E/AL/9, E/SVL/8). It is also noted that the student voice in quality assurance is limited to the institution delivering the programme, with students having little influence on and generally no contact with the (previously) validating institution (E/SLLT/12).

The interviews show that **student involvement in enhancement** is undergoing change. Structurally, both student data and student feedback are considered by the institution to act upon (E/SLQ/6, E/SVL/10, E/AL/11, E/SVL/10). Recently and less structurally at the point of interview, a change towards greater student involvement in enhancement and development itself is underway (E/SLQ/5, E/SLLT/13, E/AL/10). For instance, students are actively involved in developing future institutional strategy: *'I have four student members of the working party for the institutional learning, teaching and assessment strategy that I mentioned earlier. So we do have students involved in the enhancement side, I think quite considerably. They also will often be part of more local sort of learning design type projects. So one of the projects that comes under my remit at the moment is we're introducing from September an undergraduate first year common module which all undergraduates will be taking. That's going to be called Global Perspectives. And the student members of the working party that have designed that module were very, very hands on. They have attended all the meetings and they are going to continue to be involved in that module on an ongoing basis in terms of actual input into the line of it. So I think some of the things that we've done that were more kind of around formal structure and committees have started to feed into other areas where there wouldn't necessarily be formal requirement to include students but we realise that actually including students is a great thing.'* (E/SLLT/14). However, the impact of student involvement may sometimes be limited. One of the more student driven examples of enhancement provided in the interviews was the development of a Student Charter (E/SLLT/15, E/SLQ/8); in this case, the draft collated

by staff and students was referred back for complete redrafting according to a senior manager's expectations. This illustrates that whilst student involvement in enhancement is developing, even where student driven enhancement is moderated by staff, the institution, in line with most other HEIs, will override where deemed necessary.

Institution E does not prescribe to a single **perceived role of students** and no debate has taken place to establish a shared view: *'There hasn't been a debate that's been trained entirely around student engagement, if you see what I mean. We've tried to consider student engagement with other sort of strategic areas and quality areas but there's never been anything that's been absolutely sustained on the student engagement side in its own right.'* (E/SLLT/16).

Research participants make reference to partnership between staff and students (E/AL/12, E/SVL/13), with students also referred to as clients (E/SVL/12, E/AL/13) or consumers (E/SLQ/9), but find none of these terms adequate to describe the perceived roles of students. Partnership is felt to suggest equality, however staff recognise that inequality between staff and students exists, with the staff or the institution holding resources and power (E/AL/12). Although it is acknowledged that students have influence through their high student fees (E/AL/13), this has not led to a perception of students as consumers: *'I think of them as students, I don't think of them as customers (...) – a student comes to us, and it's the same way that they would go to any other institution and what they're paying for is an education. They're not paying for a degree, they're not paying for anything like that, they're paying for an education and they're possibly paying a little bit extra for the luxury of taking a degree in the middle of [prestigious address]. And in that respect a student is a student, they're here to learn and that's the way I see them, and for me, it's all about having an excellent relationship with that student and providing good services academically and otherwise so that they can actually achieve what they're here to do and that's to get a degree. But it's up to them ...'* (E/SLQ/9).

The only time consumerist powers are described are in relation to the students' feedback being received and responded to by Institution E's Vice Chancellor directly (E/SLLT/17), who is believed to be very aware of the demanding expectations of Institution E's student body (E/AL/14). One research participant states: *'I think we do sometimes struggle with the extent with our responsive[ness] to students. And certainly I notice, if I compare it to my time in state universities, I would have always felt that if I held an academic line as a point of principle I would be more likely to be*

supported in that from the very top to the very bottom of the institution than I would be here.' (E/SLLT/17).

4.5.1.2 Explanations for the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students.

Institutional engagement with students is undergoing some structural change at Institution E for which a number of causes can be identified.

In relation to the **student** voice, research participants state that change is the result of individual leadership of a crucial senior member of staff (E/AL/1) as well as external policy drivers, most notably by the QAA (E/SLLT/2, E/SLLT/3) since the Institution achieved degree awarding powers in 2012 and University status in 2013. One Research Participant states that: *'There is certainly a sense that we need a clear student voice. We need to be able to identify people who we can go to and get student input for things and to be able to include them in decisions that are going to affect both them and future students. I think to be frank there is also a kind of QAA element there in feeling that the kind of national expectation is to have student [re]presentation. So occasionally we find ourselves kind of reopening the question of what is appropriate for students to attend and why.'* (E/SLLT/2). Another research participant sets out specifically how the change from discipline based student voice arrangements to institutional representation was brought about: *'we've been homogenised though by getting taught-degree awarding powers and the title, so one of the things that we used to have was – we still have it but it's [not] so prominent – was we used to have student councils and that's how we engaged with them but once we'd decided we were going taught-degree awarding powers, we helped found student councils into a student union'* (E/SLQ/2).

A further cause of change is the commitment of the Students' Union itself to move towards independence: *'one of our main objectives is to be able to question the university, to work together with the university, but also question the university and there is sometimes conflict of interest when we try to achieve something but obviously we're still funded by the university, we need that budget, and sometimes we have to make compromises which is ok, but we like to generate an opinion of our own. We also like to organise certain events or gatherings independently, raising money independently and those are things that are very difficult when you work with a university...a charitable university right, because it's a non-profit university, which means that whatever event or whatever thing we organise, if we want to make a profit our budget doesn't roll over. So it's very hard for us to then try to build you know, the*

student union and try to improve our facilities, if we can't generate (...) considerable income, so that's one of the reasons. This does not mean that we're not happy working together with the university, I mean we have a very good relationship with the university but it's something that if we look across the country, we see that most student unions are independent and it just gives a lot more flexibility ...' (E/SVL/2).

In summary, three causes of change can be identified: external policy influence, internal senior staff leadership and students' union's views.

Student involvement in governance is also changing in this institution where representation of students on formal committees was already occurring. Senior staff are now involving students in the development of strategy (E/SLLT/14, E/AL/11) through working groups where strategy is developed. Such **involvement of students in enhancement activity** reportedly makes use of the quality of the student voice. At the same time staff are critical of student involvement in governance. Such criticism relates more to the organisation and support of student engagement than the quality of the student voice itself: *'I think we include students in too many different forums, at some of which they don't have anything to say and feel sometimes intimidated and certainly outnumbered by academic colleagues, and I would be in favour of having at least some forum in which the students outnumbered the staff and where they could genuinely get their ideas, opinions and feedback through without feeling somewhat at a loss. And I think we have a bit of an issue also with training, when most of the representatives are doing it on top of their degree (...). So we have a bit of a scattergun approach where we have students on everything and I personally don't think that's the best use of their time. (...) Some of the decisions are on cycles that are longer than a year, for instance, and so we've had situations where the student council membership completely changed and we had a very different opinion from one year to the next. They also have different levels of engagement depending on individuals and teams and the dynamics. But also they're sometimes jargon filled and even potentially philosophical or sometimes esoteric discussions that go on in some of the committees that require years of attendance and familiarity with all the sort of discourses to be able to properly engage with them (...) I would find we were in a committee to discuss one thing and a student, genuine student issue about something completely irrelevant will come up because it touched a nerve or reminds them of something that students have been telling them and the very fact that they've raised it in a committee that might not be the best committee for it. To me it's further evidence that they are not being sufficiently prepared for some of the engagement that we are offering currently.'* (E/SLLT/6).

Whilst recognising structural shortcomings, the same research participant also notes: *'And I think we sometimes start by doing things because we think externally people will expect us to do them and then once we're doing them we actually discover that there are real benefits and it's not just a tick box exercise.'* (E/SLLT/3). The respect for the student voice is also noted by the Student Voice Leader (E/SVL/4), who equally agrees with shortcomings in the governance structures (E/SVL/5). In this context the question arises again how considered student involvement is within the institution: *'we worry about getting students involved in everything –whether it's for the right reasons or the wrong reasons, I'm not sure'* (E/SLQ/4). It is worth noting that these responses are given by the research participants who are in charge of governance, student representation and quality respectively. These findings suggest that involving students in quality, governance and enhancement is a given expectation, rather than an owned institutional ethos. Throughout research participants' interviews reference is made to external policy expectations (QAA) as a reason for various instances of student involvement, making this perhaps the strongest motivation for Institution E's engagement with students.

In relation to **student involvement in quality assurance** one of the research participants suggests that *'a bit of pressure externally in terms of what we're projecting as an institution on learning and teaching might actually do us some good. (...) I think within the institution I think there is a sense that we want to be more and more like other universities without losing some of the things that are special and so there is a desire to be moving into things like the NSS. I think there's also recognition that at the moment we would not necessarily come out very favourable in the NSS for various reasons. That might be mitigating the general direction of travel.'* (E/SLLT/11). Again an external policy is suggested to be generating some new mechanisms that have been introduced, including a programme survey which mirrors the NSS.

Whilst there is a teaching performance related pay arrangement in place in Institution E, only one research participant refers to this in a minor manner, and it does not link it to the wider enhancement ethos or commercial considerations which drive institutional engagement with students. Some indications are provided, however, that some level of market mechanism is in action: *'we worry about getting students involved in everything –whether it is for the right reasons or the wrong reasons, I'm not sure. You know, you have the thing – the quality assurance brief with the QAA, that's all about student engagement and making sure you're doing it and I wonder sometimes are we doing it just for that? I know that if it wasn't...it's one of the questions I ask people 'if you got rid of your quality system (...) would you still be doing it? (...) You'd probably go straight*

to the students. (...) the reason we would is because we want to know who our student is in a sense of are they a customer, are they a client, are we doing the right thing, because being in the private provider world, although we have stuff going through UCAS and all the rest of it, for us it's very important the word of mouth part of marketing...' (E/SLLT/19). Others refer to the influence that students have due to the value of their (high) fees (E/AL/13, A/SVL/12, E/SLLT/17).

The **involvement of students in enhancement** is mostly reactive: *'usually it comes out of the complaint box (...) from surveys, from emails, whatever individual complaints have arisen by the union or by teachers'* (E/SVL/10). However, increasingly students are becoming involved in the actual development and enhancement of academic practices (E/SLLT/13, E/AL/10, E/SLLT/15). As part of the interview responses regarding the **perceived role of students in the institution** the reason for this new level of student engagement becomes clear. Throughout responses there is direct or indirect reference to a collaborative staff- student approach, based on the view that the institution must provide a strong student experience whilst the students remain responsible for their academic success. Students are seen to have a role in the future development and immediate adjustment of the student experience, without being or becoming responsible for the execution of what are seen as institutional responsibilities to deliver this experience (E/AL/12, E/SVL/12, E/SVL/13, E/SLLT/17). However, none of the research participants raises those views in the context of enhancement, governance or the student voice. The relationship between staff and students in engagement terms is only explicitly offered when being interviewed about the perceived role of students and their relationship with the institution. This may signify a developing ethos of staff and student collaboration which is not yet fully owned and implemented.

In summary, there are a number of factors which influence institutional engagement with students in Institution E. The most pervasive consideration is the influence of external drivers, such as policy (QAA, NSS). Other explanations for the direction institutional engagement with students has taken in Institution E include students' union views steering towards an independent student voice, some senior management leadership towards both partnership models and some consumerist approaches (VC examples). In this institution the quality of the student voice itself is respected and deemed influential, but it is also recognised that the arrangements to enable the student voice to be effective are not yet in place.

5 Analysis and discussion

In this chapter research findings are analysed across all institutions and put in the context of the literature and other relevant research. Again, the findings and discussion are organised to answer the two research questions central to this thesis.

The first section of this chapter discusses the findings across all institutions against the first research question: *‘What methods of institutional engagement with students occur in private institutions in England?’*

Collectively, the individual institutional findings have provided an insight into the motivations, causes and explanations that have given rise to various arrangements for institutional engagement with students. Many of these are common across the five institutions, although there are some distinct differences also to be noted.

Cross-institutional findings relate to this research’ second research question: *‘what influences the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students?’* These findings are presented in 6.2 as motivations and explanations shape the methods of institutional engagement with students that are the focus of this research. The findings are discussed and presented in a way that leads to a theoretical model set out in diagrammatic form (5.2.6).

5.1 Methods of institutional engagement with students

In this section cross-institutional analysis is captured in response to the first research question: *‘What methods of institutional engagement with students occur in private institutions in England?’*

To answer this question effectively, the cross-institutional findings and analysis are organised in relation to the five aspects of institutional engagement with students (see also 2.2):

- the arrangements supported by the institution to organise the representation of student views, opinions and interests. In the literature this is often referred to as *‘the student voice’*,
- the ways of engaging the student voice in formal and informal institutional decision making, or *student involvement in governance*,

- any arrangements to engage students in the evaluation and consideration of the quality of the academic student experience or student *involvement in quality assurance*,
- the arrangements made to engage students in the development of the academic student experience or *involvement of students in enhancement activity*, and
- the *perceived role of students within institutions* in relation to staff and the institution.

In order to decide which practices are worth noting, comparison is regularly made to research previously undertaken (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013, Van Der Velden et al., 2013b, Brennan et al., 2003, Little et al., 2009) which has established a baseline of knowledge about student engagement practices in the traditional higher education sector.

5.1.1 Student voice

In publicly funded (traditional) sector institutions, the student voice is usually most vocal through elected student representatives who collectively form an independent representative body within the institution, in line with legal expectations (Government, 1994). Recent research (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013) shows that for HE institutions this is the most common approach, with HE in FE providers usually working with the Students' Unions of their validating or franchising institutions to develop representation systems in their institutions. They found that it is only in small and highly vocational institutions that representatives are selected (section 5 (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013)).

A noteworthy finding in relation to the student voice in this thesis research is the alternative nature of representation arrangements in alternative providers. In all bar one case (E), there is no independent representative student body in the form of a students' union. Institution A has a students' association with many of the characteristics of a students' union, but without full independence in terms of governance and control. Two institutions (B, C) have no collective representative structure at all, which could be explained by one institution being small and the other being vocational in nature. In the one case where a students' union exists (E), this is a very recent introduction and independence comparable to publicly funded institutions is not yet fully achieved. In two other institutions the internal debate is veering towards the future representative independence, but in all bar one institution (D), a combination of selected and elected representation, or a wholly selected (B) arrangement is in place. In Institution B selection was introduced as students were not willing to come forward to be elected

independently. Moreover, in three of the participating institutions (A, B, D) the leaders of the student representative structure are in fact staff, and are selected and appointed by the institution rather than by students or representatives. In two cases, this meant that the President (by that title or otherwise) who is a member of major institutional committees and interacts directly with the senior management on student representative matters, is in fact selected and appointed by members of that senior management team. Whilst procedural mitigations (such as the use of evidence from student surveys, focus groups and similar) may be in place and could be used to inform the most senior student voice representation, there was limited evidence in the interviews of this being the case.

Remuneration for student representatives at some level is also not uncommon in the alternative providers included in this research. In three institutions this takes the form of salaried student representation leadership and this is comparable to the remuneration for elected sabbatical officers or senior support staff in traditional students' unions. However, these salaried leaders are selected by the institution rather than elected by students which differs from practice in the traditional sector. In one institution the student fees are waived in return for students taking on representative and co-production roles and another pays representatives for attending meetings. The latter practice is not unknown in the traditional sector (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013 p.27) but is contested in the context of seeking an independent, uncompromised student voice.

The combination of remuneration for representation and selection rather than election of representatives in the majority of providers investigated, indicate that the level of institutional ownership of the representative student voice is considerably higher than in traditional institutions where an independent, elected student representative body is in place (Students' Union or Guild).

This level of institutional ownership does not mean that the alternative providers included in this research do not invite the student voice. However, the systems to do so are different, in line with the propensity to work from an educational service provision ethos (see section 6.2), leading to a preference for a consultative student voice, with the initiative resting with the institution rather than the student body or their representatives. Indeed, the institutional profiles show a strong preference for direct communication and the use of student surveys. Whilst the latter is initiated by the institution, the former is not. Research participants –usually the academic leaders of senior leaders in charge of quality- describe they welcome direct communication of students and encourage this through availability of senior staff. They compare their

practices to perceived traditional practices in ways that underline direct communication between staff and students, as opposed to the more distant and formal routes of communication they perceive to be common in traditional universities. The leaders of the student voice recognise this type of direct communication too, and make reference to direct communication with the senior level of the institution specifically. It was notable that in three institutions (A, C and E) direct communication between students and the Vice Chancellor (or similar) was actively encouraged by those individuals involved.

Gathering feedback through surveys was practised in all institutions. This is not unexpected as surveying teaching quality is expected under the QAA Code of Practice (QAA, 2015b) but it also fits well with the educational service delivery model discussed earlier. In the publicly funded sector the use of feedback surveys has a pervasive and longstanding tradition (Brennan et al., 2003, Little et al., 2009, Pimentel Botas et al., 2013). In the alternative providers included in this research the survey is also much in use. All institutions have both unit or module surveys, where teaching quality is evaluated, and surveys relating to the wider student experience, ranging from programme surveys taking a holistic approach to surveys of specific aspects of the provision, such as admissions and registration processes and the quality of service functions.

Three of the institutions (A, C, E) relate the use of their teaching surveys directly to staff performance management and institutional reputation management. Whilst this relationship is not unheard of in traditional institutions, the reference made in two institutions (A, C) to staff job security and in another (E) to performance related pay goes further than has been found to be the case in traditional institutions. Moreover, in Institution A, the teaching evaluation scores are ranked with anonymised scores of other staff. This aspect appears not to be public knowledge and it should be noted that some participants and especially some of those responsible for quality, were hesitant in discussing the practice. Insights relating to this came mostly from student voice leaders as an illustration of the influence students were known to have. There is a possible relationship between the use of survey data in performance and reputation management practices and the legal ownership of the institutions. Institutions A and C are owned by a for-profit company. Institution E which uses a reward incentive in relation to teaching performance is a high fee charging not-for-profit. Considering the low number of institutions involved any conclusions must be drawn with caution but there appears to be a difference between for-profit and not-for-profit (corporate)

environments in relation to staff performance management on the basis of perceived teaching quality.

5.1.2 Student involvement in governance

Student involvement in the governance of the alternative providers was found not to be substantially different in its organisation, pervasiveness, support or training than can be found in traditional institutions (Rodgers et al., 2011). All institutions interviewed welcome student representatives onto their major institutional committees where the student voice is perceived to be influential. Where this is not the case it is because the institution is very new and governance has not yet bedded in, making none of the governance processes of major influence (Institution C). Alternatively, research participants who are staff perceive the governance structure itself to be ineffective due to overly intense levels of bureaucracy (Institution E) and note this therefore hinders the influence of the student voice. This institution also discussed whether students should be involved in all committees or whether this is too demanding for students. Only in one institution (D) the suggestion is made that the quality and engagement of the student voice is not quite as desired and relies on staff interventions. None of these findings are very different from those in traditional institutions (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013) or even Further Education institutions with Higher Education provision (Little et al., 2009). In all parts of the sector it is equally difficult to recruit student representatives effectively for certain roles such as standing for curriculum approval committees or intermediate level committees. Students do not engage with these easily, as they do not understand what is expected of them or they believe they lack the necessary expertise.

Support and training for student representatives who take on governance roles is in place much like in the traditional sector. In one institution (B) there is even an accredited module on student representation. Whilst there is little published research on the issue in traditional institutions, it is not unusual for students' unions themselves to provide training and support for student representatives. In the alternative providers included in the research, this is more likely to be undertaken by staff or appointed leadership of the student representative system. This shows how the representative student voice in governance terms is not independent from staff and institutional influence.

A committee particularly important for engagement with students on academic matters is now commonly in place in universities under the current quality assurance expectations (QAA, 2012b). This is the Staff-Student Liaison Committee or SSLC,

which is in place to enable direct communication between leadership and student representatives of a programme or cognate set of programmes regarding the student learning experience on that programme. There are many institutional variations of SLLCs in the traditional sector, but the principle of regular meetings of student representatives with a selection of staff is maintained. In the alternative providers, it is in only one institution (A) that an SLLC is in place in the traditional manner. In all other institutions alternative arrangements have been made. In Institution B, SSLCs were found not to be effective due to students often studying part-time or at a distance. Here, but also in Institutions D and E, the SSLC had been replaced by one single committee covering all programmes, where items for discussion are set by staff, although student representatives –who are in the minority- are invited to raise any other matters. Institution C also has no SSLC but has initially replaced it with meetings of all students from a set of programmes, as this is possible due to the size of the student cohorts. From the interview responses it is clear that the alternative arrangements, with the exception of the all-student meeting in Institution C, are options whereby staff set the agenda; in some cases, the SSLC function and programme monitoring and management functions are rolled into one.

Earlier research (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013) has noted that whereas institutions experience SSLCs as less influential than other means of engaging students (surveys, governance), students' unions find them more influential than any other routes of engagement (p. 58), including surveys related directly to the students' programme experience. I have already established that students' unions in alternative providers are rare and the Students' Union views of unions in the traditional sector may not represent those of students in alternative provision. Nonetheless, SSLCs allow direct communication, often led by the student voice regarding matters that concern students through student representation. With these replaced or subsumed into other programme meetings, students appear to have less of a voice at the discipline level in alternative providers than in traditional institutions.

5.1.3 Student involvement in Quality Assurance

Across the alternative providers interviewed, students are involved in standard assurance practices such as feeding back through surveys, governance arrangements and focus groups. When evaluating the engagement of students in quality assurance it is worth noting that there are distinct differences between those alternative providers with their own degree awarding powers and those that are subject to accreditation by others. In case of the latter, less latitude is provided in terms of innovation and

engagement of students, as several quality assurance processes and decisions are under the control of the validating institution.

In relation to programme assurance, Institution B and C consult with students on new programme proposals, Institution A includes students in the approval process and Institution C involves students in all stages of programme design and consideration. In some of the institutions students are not involved in approval and review mechanisms as these are undertaken by accrediting institutions. Pimentel Botas et al. (2013) note that in their research the level of involvement in programme design, (re-)approval and review is increasing across the traditional sector, but not yet ubiquitous. In that sense, the alternative providers are comparable in their practices to the traditional sector.

In most alternative providers involvement in the formal aspects of quality assurance is consultative, although there are exceptions of note, specifically in Institution A and C (see below), whilst both institutions D and E foresee future change to the involvement of students in quality assurance due to external pressures. The latter relates most to anticipated changes to the QAA review methodology which is believed to expect greater involvement of students (D), and the anticipated introduction of the NSS for alternative providers (E). If this were to occur, the Senior Leader for Learning and Teaching of Institution E expects that an emphasis on student satisfaction would induce considerable change for the institution, and would require a more student-engaged way of working. However, both institutions recognise the consultative approach generally taken to engagement with students in line with the educational service provision ethos described in 6.1.2. These findings show that engagement with students for the interviewed alternative providers is undergoing change, moving from students in a consultative role towards more engaged student involvement in quality and governance.

Some practices of engaging students in quality assurance are unusual and innovative and already go beyond the consultative approach. Institution A has a systematic annual practice of reviewing its student learning experience by inviting their student representative body to produce a student submission which evaluates all provision and is collated entirely independent from any institutional involvement. This practice allows students a powerful student voice at the highest level of governance of the institution. Similarly, Institution A holds thematic reviews which are of a higher level of independent enquiry than thematic reviews known in the traditional sector. The powers given to the review panel which includes two student members, are akin to those of an institution's internal audit, with the right to interrogate anyone in the institution and

access to all data deemed relevant to the inquiry. Again this shows a powerful student voice within the quality assurance system of the Institution A, which reaches well beyond the powers provided to students in similar circumstances within the traditional sector.

Institution C provides insight into a further number of innovative practices. Firstly the institution, which is still establishing itself, is basing its future on the design and development input informed by three parties: the institution, the students and the employers. Whilst most of the input from these three groups is enhancement related, the use of degree concept teams where the three parties collectively develop new programmes, is a quality assurance matter. A second example is the introduction of an appraisal scheme for students where feedback on their progress is received and discussed, whilst at the same time feedback from the students on the student learning experience is given to the institution. Institution C also engages students in unit development with a view to seeing part of the educational provision in future developed and delivered by students themselves. This is undertaken with the intention of fostering entrepreneurialism but it also allows students a level of initiative and engagement that would be unusual in the traditional sector. Furthermore, according to the senior leader for learning and teaching, this institution welcomes students who are not representatives, to engage in governance and quality assurance if they declare an interest in such engagement. These three examples of innovative engagement of students in quality practices illustrates a trust in the quality and value of the contributions students are perceived to be able to make, which is unusual in both the traditional sector and the other alternative providers included in this research. It also illustrates some potential for innovation of alternative providers, which is one of the factors driving current policy proposals to expand the sector (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016).

5.1.4 Student involvement in Enhancement activity

Research in the traditional sector shows that feedback from students gives impetus for change (Brennan et al., 2003, Little et al., 2009), with both transactional and transformational change taking place as a result (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013). The alternative providers in this research put a similar emphasis on feedback as a driver for enhancement. Students provide feedback through surveys and governance and in two institutions through an enhancement committee (A) and a Student Experience Group (B). These approaches fit with the educational service provision ethos, which locates the responsibility for enhancement with the institution and staff, in response to service feedback from the student users (see 6.2).

In the four institutions where an emphasis on consultative feedback is prevalent (A, B, D, E), it is unusual for students to be involved in the improvement of the student learning provision itself; staff referred to enhancement as a staff responsibility, as well as to concerns about being overly demanding of students. There are some counter examples, even in providers with an educational service provision ethos. In institution B a ‘Student Engagement Week’ has been introduced, intended to provide extra-curricular learning for students, gather their feedback on the wider student experience and launch new student societies. A number of these activities are student-led. In Institutions B and E, the Student Charters were co-produced with students and in Institution D students had been involved in projects on defining physical classroom quality, timing of assessment, development of support for disabled students and the creation of a skills unit in response to feedback by students.

Where other alternative providers do not usually involve students in enhancing practice and provision beyond providing feedback and consulting on proposals, Institution C views student engagement in enhancement as part of the entrepreneurial learning experience that the institution wishes to offer. In this institution students have worked with staff to co-create both transactional enhancements such as a time tabling app and transformational enhancements such as new units (see 5.3.1). Examples of a similar approach can be found in the traditional sector and is described in the literature as ‘students as change agents’

5.1.5 Perceived role of students within institutions

Prior research (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013) shows that in traditional UK higher education institutions, students are most often perceived as stakeholders, then partners and then as customers or consumers. Other roles are also assigned to students but less frequently so. In the much smaller group of alternative providers included in this thesis the perception of student roles is not significantly different, although a ranked preference across institutions for the roles cannot be discerned. The four common roles in the institutions are partners, stakeholders, customers and clients, with clients being least used. It should be noted that these terms were used as prompts in the interview question, using insights gained from the Pimental Botas et al research. In order to analyse the responses in detail, I returned to the interview data held in NVivo and found the following distribution of responses:

Table 3: student roles as described by research participants

Institution	Partners	Customers	Clients	Stakeholders
A	SVL	SVL		

B	SLQ	SLQ	SLQ	
		AL		AL
	SLLT	SLLT		SLLT
	SVL	SVL	SVL	SVL
C		SLQ		SLQ
	AL	AL		AL
	SLLT			
			SVL	
D	SLQ	SLQ	SLQ	SLQ
	AL	AL		AL
		SLQ	SLQ	SVL
	AL			SLQ
E	SLLT	SLLT		AL
	SVL		SVL	
		SLQ		SLQ
	AL		AL	
		SLLT		

Table 3 shows that in none of the institutions are the roles of students narrowly perceived. All institutions and almost all participants recognise several student roles simultaneously. No role preference occurs when taking into account the type of respondent, with exception of the Senior Leaders for Quality who all relate to the role of student as customer, most likely reflecting the discussions that have taken place across the sector about student consumerism in the quality context.

All bar one research participant answered the relevant question and identified one or more named roles that students are perceived to have within their institution. The only participant who did not, was the Senior Leader for Learning and Teaching at Institution C who described how the institution is working towards students co-producing and delivering the student learning experience and how this changes the role of students from what they might generally experience in traditional universities.

In institutions C, D and E the interviews included limited discussion of the role of students, whilst this was much more extensively discussed by participants from Institution A and B. Institution A is the only institution where extensive debate of student engagement had taken place in recent years. In this institution all research

participants included partner and customer roles in their descriptions of how students are perceived, with little emphasis on stakeholder and client roles.

Institution B also showed more of a focus on two roles: customer and stakeholder, identified by three out of four participants. These choices were related by the participants to the ethos of the professional body organisation from which this institution has grown. Students are expected to graduate from the programmes the institution offers and will then remain with the professional body for their entire career. The client/ stakeholder relationship therefore starts when future professionals engage with the organisation for the first time as students. This argument is made by several of the research participants in the interviews and was described as a pervasive ethos affecting multiple aspects of engagement with students.

5.2 Cross institutional explanations for the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students

In this section explanations and motivations that were recorded as individual institutional findings are considered collectively so as to establish whether causal patterns for institutional engagement practices could be identified.

First, the concept of an engagement dialogue between students and their institutions is introduced; this allows the explanations and causes given by research participants for the stronger or lesser involvement of students by the institution in the management and organisation of the student learning experience (6.2.1) to be placed within a continuum. Then the relative independence of the student voice in the different institutions is compared and this is shown to be a crucial power that influences the balance of the dialogue between institution and students (6.2.2).

Section 6.2.3 and 6.2.4 set out two causes of influence on the institutional side of the engagement dialogue whilst 6.2.5 and 6.2.6 give insight into two major influences on the student voice within the equation. Finally 6.2.7 sets out how external policy and reviews have an all-pervasive influence on the institutional engagement with students and both the institution and students themselves.

5.2.1 Educational service provision ethos and the co-ownership ethos

Institutional engagement with students can be understood as a dialogue between the institution and its staff on the one hand, and students and the collective student voice on the other. Within this dialogue different powers and positions as well as historic and contextual influences can come to play a part. Depending on a myriad of factors, the

dialogue may lean more towards the institutional side initiating, steering and controlling engagement, with consequent outcomes for the way in which educational provision and the student learning experience are organised. Similarly, where the influence of the student voice grows, a more collective approach to managing and developing the student and educational experience may develop. This balance between the institutional and the student voice is much discussed in the literature on student engagement. Indeed, Arnstein (1969) already described different stages of participation by those who are subject to the decisions of others, as seen in Figure 3. In her case this relates to citizens and those who hold power such as local government.

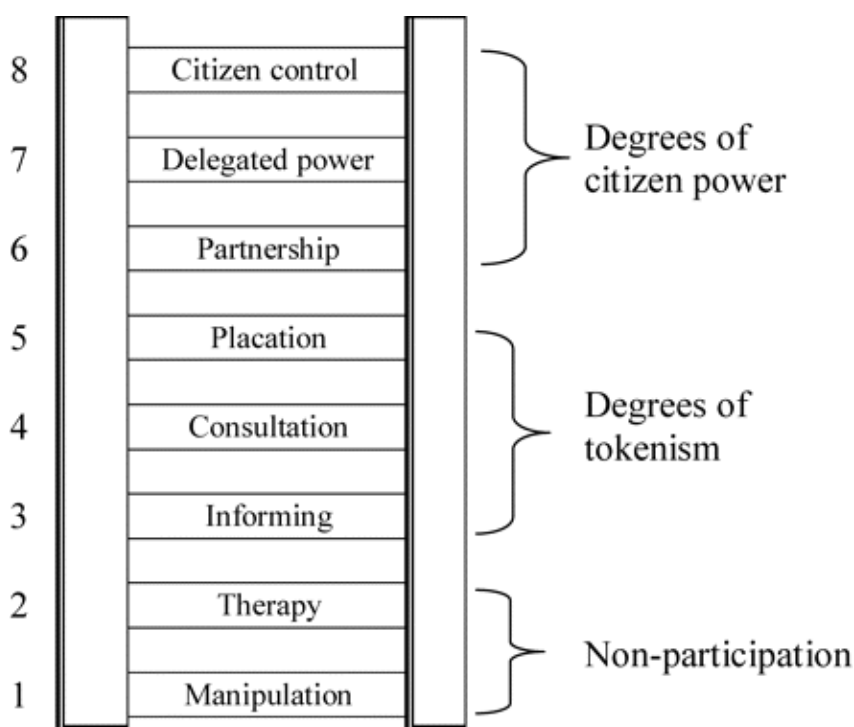


Figure 3 - Participation ladder as in Arnstein (1969) From: Community Development Journal, Oxford Press <http://cdj.oxfordjournals.org/content/43/1/65/F1.expansion>

Whilst a stepped participation model for engagement with students in alternative providers could not be made on the basis of research findings due to the limited number of institutions involved, the balancing of power and influence is recognisable. Indeed, other researchers have also referred to continua of engagement (Kay et al., 2012, Healey et al., 2014, Ashwin and Mcvitty, 2015) where the focus lies on the activity or role of students. A notably different approach is Carey's nested hierarchy of student engagement interactions (2013a), based on prior work in the compulsory education sector by Fielding (2001). In this nested hierarchy the role of institutions in engagement with students is recognised, ranging from progressive institutional engagement with students as change agents; collaborative with students as partners; responsive with students as participants and reactive with students as a source of data.

Whilst authors use different terminology and a variable number of steps, such a continuum moves from no or data-only engagement through consultation with students, to enabling participation, to encouraging partnership and finally to co-production or leadership of the student learning experience. Analysis of explanations and causes of the five institutional providers in this study show, at least a similar balancing of influence and control between the efforts of institutions to provide education and the – potential – interest of students to steer the form educational provision will take.

For this research then, it is suggested that between these extremes, consultation, partnership and co-production can be found. It should be noted that due the limited number of institutions included in this research means it is not possible to define the transitions for alternative providers in line with any of the described, more refined theoretical models considered.

Within four of the five alternative providers (A, B, D, E) there was a clear presence of a specific engagement ethos relating to the roles staff and students have respectively within the institution. Driven by the intention to meet learner expectations, staff described how they sought feedback from students about the quality of their experience. The voice given to students in this model was mostly not engaged in an active way. Instead, the emphasis was on consultation of students on aspects of the student learning experience. Equally when new academic practices were being developed or existing practices were under review, the engagement sought from students was consultative. In these institutions the initiative to engage students is largely staff driven. Some research participants explained that involvement of students in the design or development of enhancements of practice or policy would be undesirable as such involvement was not their responsibility. This sense that it is the responsibility of the institution and its staff to provide a good student learning experience was a recurring theme in research participants' responses.

Having noted the wording chosen by the quoted research participant I have called this an **educational service provision ethos**, whereby institutional staff take responsibility for the delivery of the educational experience and actively seek student feedback to inform the manner in which this provision is organised, developed and adjusted. Whilst students' opinions and experiences are actively invited, evaluated and reflected upon, students have limited or no involvement in the evaluative process and no involvement in the design, development or delivery of changes in educational practices that aim to enhance educational service delivery.

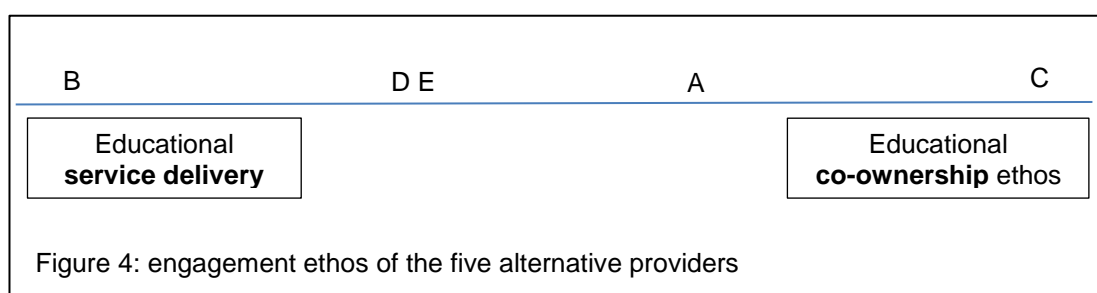
Consideration of service models in higher education is not new (Ng and Forbes, 2009). In relation to basing service delivery on feedback specifically, Sultan and Wong (2012) refer to the application of satisfaction models being used to evaluate quality of higher education services in their work. They specifically refer to the use of a Customer Satisfaction Index (Johnson et al., 2001), used to inform quality of service evaluation and future development. Central to this concept is that customer satisfaction is the ultimate intended outcome of a 'pure' service model where person-to-person interaction is key (Solomon et al., 1985). The quality of the service as perceived by customers is the determinant of that satisfaction, whilst the responsibility for developing, enhancing and providing that quality, remains with the service provider. Sultan and Wong recognise how understanding student satisfaction is key within Higher Education institutions which embrace the service model approach, and this recognition, albeit without reference to any theory, is reflected in the service ethos as expressed by the research participants.

The findings of the current study indicate that the underlying motivations and values that led to an educational service provision ethos differed. According to the academic and quality leaders interviewed in institution B, where the service provision views were most strongly held, the roots of this ethos lay in the original mission of the institution. This institution grew out of a professional accrediting body with a mission to provide services for a community of professionals. In Institution E research participants noted the high fee level the students paid for their education and accepted the expectation that the institution was responsible for delivering a high quality educational service to high fee paying students. Both this institution and Institution D discussed the influence of recruiting a largely international student body, with consequent expectations. Both institutions refer to some level of dependence of their students on the delivery of a strongly supported educational experience.

The only institution (C) which took a different approach was in its second year of delivering Higher Education programmes. This institution involves students very strongly in the co-production of their educational experience and even learning experiences for current and future students. The involvement of students was strongest in relation to curriculum development and included development of content for units. This is an aspect which is in traditional institutions still contested (Van Der Velden, 2013b) and gives students ownership of academic standards, albeit in a controlled context. This institution does not subscribe to an educational service provision ethos and intends to take rather the opposite route whereby student and staff shape the

future institution and co-own the educational experience. In Institution C this went as far as seeking to encourage students to develop up to half of the elective modules that would make up part of their course. Moreover, the leadership of that institution foresaw a situation whereby students might take on teaching roles. It is perhaps worth noting that there is some difference between the pervasive nature of a co-ownership ethos and the use of co-production approaches, which may not be used beyond developing only particular aspects of student learning experience.

Within the context of alternative providers, the continuum between power and control resting with the institution and resting with the student body, both the educational service delivery ethos and the educational co-ownership ethos are easily fitted. More specifically, Institution B and Institution C are most far apart in their ethos in relation to engaging students. Institution A allows for a strong steering from their student body on setting the enhancement agenda. Institutions D and E are closer to the educational service delivery with relatively little student partnership or leadership and a focus on consultation approaches. This is shown graphically in figure 4.



Having established a continuum of institutional engagement with students as above, it is worth noting that whilst any ethos of engagement in itself is a mechanism that influences engagement practices is also influenced by other factors. This research assumes influences are conceptually understood to come from two directions, as the dialogue of engagement is held between the institutional ethos and the student voice. The dialogic nature of engagement is similarly understood in other research, such as by Carey (2013a).

The following sections set out explanations for the current situation within the five institutions and for the focus of their future engagement developments, where reported. In section 5.3 the overall model is evaluated for its research and professional value.

5.2.2 Institutional ethos: the nature of ownership and mission of the institution

Within the general ethos of the institution, the nature of ownership and the mission motivated institutional engagement with students. The link between institutional culture or mission and engagement with students has been explored previously (Eliophotou-Menon, 2003, Van Der Velden, 2012a) but not in private institutions. As Fielden et al. (2010) recognised, the nature of private institutions is difficult to categorize and missions and types of provision in the UK can vary widely. Based on responses by the research participants, for the five institutions included in the research the following ownership characteristics were deemed relevant to institutional engagement with students: the for-profit or not-for-profit nature of the institution; the nature of the organisation that owned the institution and the specific mission of the institution.

Institutions A and C are not-for-profit but owned by commercial, international, for-profit organisations. Research participants from institution A, and specifically the student voice leader (student, appointed) referred to the for-profit ownership bringing a commercial ethos into the not-for-profit institution which expected staff to deliver a high quality 'service' for students. This was then related to the educational service delivery ethos of the institutions. Reference was made to the marketing relevance of good feedback in support of developing a strong reputation. It can be seen that, in the case of institution A, the for-profit ethos informs directly the educational service delivery ethos of institutional engagement with students.

In Institution C the interviews did not make reference to any commercial interest in the context of engagement with students. Whilst the institution is expected to grow to an efficient level and the company intends to offer higher education related services in future, the presence of the owning company was raised only by the senior leader for learning and teaching, who will have most direct engagement with the company. However, the educational mission of the institution as expressed by the same senior leader is very specific with an emphasis on entrepreneurial approaches. Further discussion illustrated how a pedagogy of independence and co-ownership of the learning shaped the approach to engagement with students. Students wishing to be involved in governance, whether they are representatives or not, may take part, and proposals for development of projects or learning experiences are given the support required when deemed relevant. Obtaining agreement to proceed with a project may involve students pitching to a senior manager in the owning company to gain business support; this process also provides valuable learning experiences for students. These examples illustrate how, through engaging students in governance, enhancement and other aspects, students are supported to take leadership of their educational

experience. Thus, Institution C provides an example of practices that align with the leadership level of the engagement of students, described by Ashwin and McVitty (2015), resulting from the mission and senior leadership of the institution. The pedagogical mission of the institution and the level of engagement with students are clearly linked in this institution.

Much like Institution C, Institution B has a particular mission which relates to its ownership. The institution grew out of a long existing professional body; professionals were members for their entire career and undertook much of their continuous professional development through this organisation. The Academic Leader and Senior Leader for Learning and Teaching both recognise how the mission of the wider organisation influences the institution and relate the mission to the institutional educational service delivery ethos.

Institution E is also a not for-profit provider with a history of providing higher education. It has developed as an alternative provider in the tradition of elite British Higher Education for international students with small group teaching and high levels of student support (and related higher fees). It is in this institution where the discussion about the independence of the student voice is most strongly driven by the student voice leader with reference to a wider discussion amongst student representatives on the issue. The driver here appears to be a strong academic ethos with emphasis on learning from what is perceived to be best practice in the sector. Research participants from this institution describe a more participative approach to enhancement being implemented already and are working towards a fully independent students' union and the Students' Union has particular plans in this direction.

Institution D is a for-profit provider and there is evidence of a strong commercial drive within the institution. However, rather than working for profits, the institution is aiming for financial survival. As the institution has suffered dramatic losses in student numbers and thus fees, the staff focus on ensuring a good standard of educational provision is delivered in a bid to regain a healthy recruitment offer in a changing policy environment. The approach taken is one of service provision with even the student voice viewing enhancement and development as a matter for the institution that is driven by student feedback. Again, the service delivery approach is driven by the nature of the institution and in this case also a – perhaps temporary – institutional mission. Such a change in mission is not unknown in the private sector where reasons for decline often relate to social and political causes. The latter includes growth of market share in the public sector (Levy, 2013) which is akin to what has happened in

the UK's traditional HE market where student numbers have no longer been capped. The former includes a change in demographics, also recognised by Levy; in this case a decline of numbers of international students entering the UK due to restrictive visa policies.

In summary, the nature of ownership and mission of the institution influences the institutional ethos that steers engagement with students.

5.2.3 Institutional ethos: senior leadership

Behind the different arrangements in the five institutions lie a range of considerations and explanations that generated the student representative mechanisms in place at the time of interview, and that were leading to planned changes to these arrangements. In all the institutions senior leadership substantially influenced the ways in which staff and the institution engage with students. Referring to literature from the compulsory education sector, Trowler (2013) recognises three aspects of leadership that help establish a climate in which student engagement can develop positively: academic leadership, resource provision and communication promotion. All three came to the fore in the research interviews for this thesis and are discussed here. Whilst the first two, academic leadership and resource provision, may be clear, the promotion of communication by leaders refers to developing attitudes and practices that allow for open, often non-hierarchical and reciprocal communication between students and staff, including leaders. It is proposed that this type of communication enables a level of engagement whereby students can come to co-lead enhancement activity.

In Institution C academic leadership is explicitly evident as has been shown in excerpts from interviews with the Senior Leader for Learning and Teaching that have been used so far. Ample reference was made to an academic vision for the newly established institution and other staff interviewed from the same institution referred to the strong influence of the leadership in terms of moving student towards co-ownership of the educational student experience. In other cases a senior leader in the institution has explicit and widely shared views which influence the behaviours and attitudes of other staff in the institution. In a rare book chapter about student engagement in private providers (Rivers and Williams, 2013) excerpts of an interview with Professor Lygo (VC of BPP, a private University) further illustrate the importance of leadership influence by describing how leadership has changed engagement with students in BPP.

The second aspect suggested by Trowler, resource provision, was not a specific focus of the interviews. Nonetheless, some respondents referred to resource allocation,

specifically in Institution C and Institution D. In Institution C the Senior Leader for Learning and Teaching who is the most senior leader in the institution referred to students proposing projects and new learning opportunities which she then had to decide to resource, or in some cases, decide to allow to be pitched to directors of the company that owned the institution. In Institution D it was noted that some of the projects selected by the institution from student feedback related particularly to responding to resource needs identified by students, such as space and infrastructure requirements. In other cases, senior leadership had decided to select and appoint student voice leadership and this too is an allocation of resources to student engagement that set a particular approach to the institutional dialogue.

Communication promotion was evident in three institutions (A, C and E). Research participants refer to their Vice Chancellors (or equivalent) engaging in direct, unstructured and informal contact with students. In Institution A this involves both informal communication (lunch at the Savoy) as well as an annual invitation for a student written submission. Staff in the institution are certainly aware of these events. In Institution C and E students are known to interact directly and often with the respective Vice Chancellors. Whilst this is perceived positively in Institution C, it is felt to be of mixed value in Institution E. Notably, in Institution C a co-ownership approach to engagement is espoused whilst in Institution E a debate regarding the appropriate level of engagement with students is ongoing. In these three institutions there is also mention made of the importance of direct communication more broadly. Participants, both staff and student voice leaders, described explicit student centred behaviours by leaders, such as meeting with students informally and responding strongly to feedback received.

Explicit or implicit, strong leadership views clearly influence how students are perceived and hence, how the student voice is organised. In all institutions research participants register awareness of expectations that senior managers have, although in two cases this does not relate to the most senior leader (Vice Chancellor) but to academic leadership at levels near the top.

Senior leadership itself can be influenced by other factors identified, such as the external policy and review (accountability) context, the institution's owning company or charity and its actors, or a strong and influential student voice within the institution. In summary, senior leadership and the nature and mission of institutions are major influences on the institutional ethos in alternative providers.

The next two sections address two influences identified from the research that influence the student voice side of the engagement dialogue. These are changes in the student body and the quality of the student voice.

5.2.4 Student voice: the nature of the student body

Characteristics of the student body are known to influence the way in which students are engaged. Research undertaken previously (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013) has shown that considerable differences exist between common practices of engagement with full-time undergraduate students, who are often collectively organised and can be available for involvement in institutional activities (meetings, projects, discussions) with some flexibility, and part-time mature students, where collectively represented engagement is less likely and the ability to engage with institutional activity is more challenging for practical reasons. Also, postgraduate students and distance learning students are known to seek more direct involvement and are more wide ranging in social and economic as well as personal circumstance, which affects their ability to engage in institutional activities. Little et al. (2009) add that different groups also have varying motivations and attitudes towards higher education, explaining how engagement with different student groups will vary in organisation, intention, intensity and potentially effectiveness. Both studies mentioned have a main focus on traditional institutions, but the research undertaken for this thesis show how influences which are not dissimilar also occur in alternative provision. This is most clearly illustrated when changes in the student body occur.

In three of the institutions the arrangements for engagement with students underwent redevelopment because of demographic changes in the student body, triggered by other factors. In Institution A there was a move from largely postgraduate professional learners to a more mixed undergraduate and postgraduate student body. This change occurred as the institution's mission was broadened to include undergraduate provision and become a degree awarding university. Institutional leaders recognised not only a change in the level of dependence on support and directed teaching the new undergraduate cohorts demanded, but also a difference in the students' relationship with the institution towards partnership. This institution has since included students in governance, assurance and enhancement subsequently and is now moving towards establishing an elected collective student representation body.

In Institution C the entire student body is new, as the institution has only very recently started. The ethos of co-ownership of the educational student experience by students and the institution has been described in detail previously.

In Institution D the student body has each year halved in size, for three consecutive years. The type of students recruited also changed from international overseas students to students who are UK citizens. In interviews it was noted that the relationship with international students was experienced as 'easier' as there was a stronger level of (visa related) dependence on the institution than the new home undergraduates had. The home student were perceived as more demanding. In this institution an attitudinal change in the student voice led to discussion on introducing a more independent student voice and subsequent changes to mechanisms of engagement.

As a result of changes in the student body, institutions need to realign their communication and engagement mechanisms, so as to accurately identify new student needs and interests. This process of re-alignment of engagement processes to a changing student body will be reflected in several of the aspects of institutional engagement with students. The student voice may be invited and organised in different ways, with more or less direct communication, structured feedback opportunities or representation. Governance involvement may change due to an increased or diminished interest and ability of a changed student body to engage outside taught hours or in more formal settings. In relation to quality assurance and enhancement similar considerations may play a role and more or less involved arrangements may be required. The perceived role of students, especially, will alter as a different balance of students engage with the education on offer.

5.2.5 Student voice: the independence and quality of the student voice

In the context of determining institutional engagement with students, the term 'quality' is used here not to refer to quality assurance related aspects, but to how reliably the student voice is representative of and informed by the student body for which it speaks. The student voice can be heard through a range of approaches, depending on the aspect under enquiry. Student data, surveys, focus groups, representative sampling of opinions and other ways of establishing interests, opinion and experience of students are used in higher education (Little et al., 2009). Important in any of the processes used is that the student voice can be relied upon (by the institution, staff, externals as well as the students themselves) to reflect student views and experiences accurately and not to the views of one group above another; it is also important that it is communicated in ways that show such reliability is intact. Within the traditional higher education sector this is understood to mean that the student voice has to be representative of all students and is independent of external or institutional coercion. In

the UK, institutions in the traditional higher education sector organise the student voice through students' unions and guilds (Rodgers et al., 2011, CUC and NUS, 2011) which are independent representative organisations.

There is legal grounding for this independence. Part II, section 20 of the Education Act (1994) sets out the requirement for every university to have a students' union which represents all higher education students of that institution. This part of the Act does not apply to alternative providers of Higher Education unless they are in receipt of public funding. Hence, there is currently no legal requirement on alternative providers to establish a students' union and these are relatively rare in alternative providers. Instead representatives are often selected by staff or the institution rather than independently elected and where independent bodies exist, these tend to be led by staff rather than students.

Research participants refer in interviews nonetheless to three of the institutions' efforts to establish a students' union, for instance in support of the acquisition of a University title for the institution. Alternatively, senior leadership conviction leads the institution towards a more independent student representative arrangement or it is in fact the student leadership itself that drives the discussion. In any case, four of the five institutions (A, B, D and E) are working towards more independence for the student voice. The fifth institution (C) is new and so does not have a history to develop from, be it towards independence or otherwise. In all four institutions where the move towards greater independence was raised the drivers for independence were different. In Institutions A and E the drivers are comparability to traditional universities, perceptions of external policy and review, the quality of the student voice itself and academic leadership. Institution B has no intention of establishing a representative body but does acknowledge a need for representatives to be more independent and possibly elected. This is seen as important specifically by the Student Voice Leader (staff). In Institution D the Senior Leader for Learning and Teaching is leading the development to independence whilst it is also recognised that external expectations drive the institution towards more independent student involvement. The strongest argument in this institution towards a more independent student voice though comes from changes in the student body from international students to home students.

It seems apparent that the student voice is a dependent mechanism, rather than an independent explanation in itself. The drive towards a more independent student representative arrangement was presented by all research participants who mentioned it, as a response to another change or identified need, such as perceived external

expectations, senior leadership preferences, isomorphic efforts (Powell and Dimaggio, 1991, Levy, 2006) to align with the traditional HE sector or organisational and student body changes within the institution.

Though none of the institutions has a fully independent representative students' union, research participants in three institutions (A, C, E) illustrated that the initial presence of the student voice can in itself act as a motivation for increasing, enhancing or re-organising arrangements for hearing the student voice. The student voice may have gained presence as a result of other levers, such as leadership expectations, external policy or inherited practices, but when the student (representative) contributions are experienced positively by staff, this has a positive impact on the credibility of the student voice and hence the likelihood that staff will want to engage with it more regularly (Eliophotou-Menon, 2003).

The interviews show how the credibility of the student voice becomes embedded over time, creating environments in which institutional staff implicitly accept the value of the student voice, whilst externals may still express surprise (Institution A). In an institution where the level of embeddedness of the student voice in governance, quality management and development is high, the student voice is highly rated and some level of equality in day to day communication is achieved between staff and students. This finding suggests the possibility of a cyclical process of increasing engagement with the student voice, if the quality of student contributions is perceived as valuable.

This generative mechanism must however be seen in combination with the educational service provision ethos, where implicit limitations are impacting the involvement of the student voice. Most notably, interview findings illustrate that even when the quality of the student voice is deemed valuable and becomes structurally included, involvement is consultative, and initiative for enhancement or strategic development remains with the staff and the institution.

In summary, the nature of the student body as well as the independence and quality of the student voice influence how the institution engages with the student body. The following section set out in more detail how both the student voice and the institutional ethos are influenced by factors external to the institution.

5.2.6 External policy, external reviews and comparability across the sector

Certain forms of student engagement practices have been in place for some time. However, external policies impacting on the way alternative providers engage with their

students are relatively recent in nature. Institutional engagement with the student voice is not new in higher education institutions (Rodgers et al., 2011, Little et al., 2009) and there is no indication in the research findings that it is new in alternative providers, with some more established institutions (A, B and E) reporting that current engagement arrangements have been built on a longer history of engagement with students on their views, opinions and interests. One institution (C) has no history of engagement as it has been established very recently, whilst Institution D is the only one where interviews have provided no insights into earlier forms of engagement with students than the institution currently has in place.

Institutional engagement with students precedes recent national policy developments such as the introduction of the Student Engagement Chapter of the Quality Code (QAA, 2012a) or the introduction of student fees (BIS, 2011) and external accountability. Previously common forms of institutional engagement with students included the use of feedback surveys, staff student liaison committees and engagement through student representative bodies such as students' unions or guilds (Little et al., 2009). In the past compliance with expectations to use such engagement arrangements was not always expected from alternative providers. Quality related student engagement for institutions that do not have degree awarding powers is subject to oversight by the validating or franchising institution; this allows, in practice, some flexibility in terms of compliance with quality expectations. Alternative providers are often smaller providers and are more likely to recruit part-time, international and mature students, thus having student populations that do not fall within the more traditional grouping of full-time undergraduate home students, for whom much student engagement policy tends to be developed. As a result of these factors, institutional engagement in alternative providers could be expected to differ from the way it occurs in traditional, larger, public funded institutions.

Due to recent UK funding changes (BIS, 2013, BIS, 2015a, BIS, 2015c) - moving from funding student places available indirectly through publicly funded validating or franchising institutions towards greater reliance on directly funded places in alternative providers and Further Education - it has become more attractive and desirable for alternative providers to seek degree awarding powers. The process of acquiring such powers requires a higher level of strict compliance (institutions A, B, E). Moreover, recent national developments as set out in 2.3 and 2.6, have increased and formalised expectations on institutions regardless of their awarding status and encourage explicitly or implicitly a focus on student experiences and interests. Some external accountability arrangements such as NSS, OFFA and OIA have in the past not applied to alternative

providers. This has changed the manner in which HE institutions choose to engage with their students. Moreover, due to the same policy changes the student voice itself has changed. With a larger intake due to changes in the cap for student numbers, alternative providers have recruited a demographically more diverse student body. As set out in section 5.2.4 this has led to changes in the student voice.

Alternative providers show in the interviews that they intend to move towards greater compliance with policy and review expectations. Several research participants have made reference to the need to compete on an even footing with traditional higher education providers and sought access to full participation in KIS, the NSS and sector debates. Throughout the interviews an interest in comparing alternative provider practices to the more traditional institutions was notable. This generally related to competition for students in the sector, but also related to a pride in the perceived advantage of being different from traditional universities.

Here then a juxtaposition of influences on institutional engagement with students can be found. Whilst some institutions closely follow external policy expectations in order to achieve recognition and status (university title or degree awarding powers) undertaking an isomorphist approach (Powell and Dimaggio, 1991, Levy, 2006) to fit in with the traditional sector, there is also a drive towards differentiation from the traditional sector in order to demonstrate the innovative and unique nature of the alternative provider. The tension between compliance and isomorphism versus differentiation and innovation is clearly not unique to alternative providers, but has become more visible due to the government driven slow transition of the sector to include more alternative provision (BIS, 2011, BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016). The generative nature of external policy and review developments is, in both directions, influential, with almost all research participants making reference to national and sector influences.

Figure 5 shows how the external policy environment pervades all generative mechanisms, influencing institutional engagement with students in alternative providers.

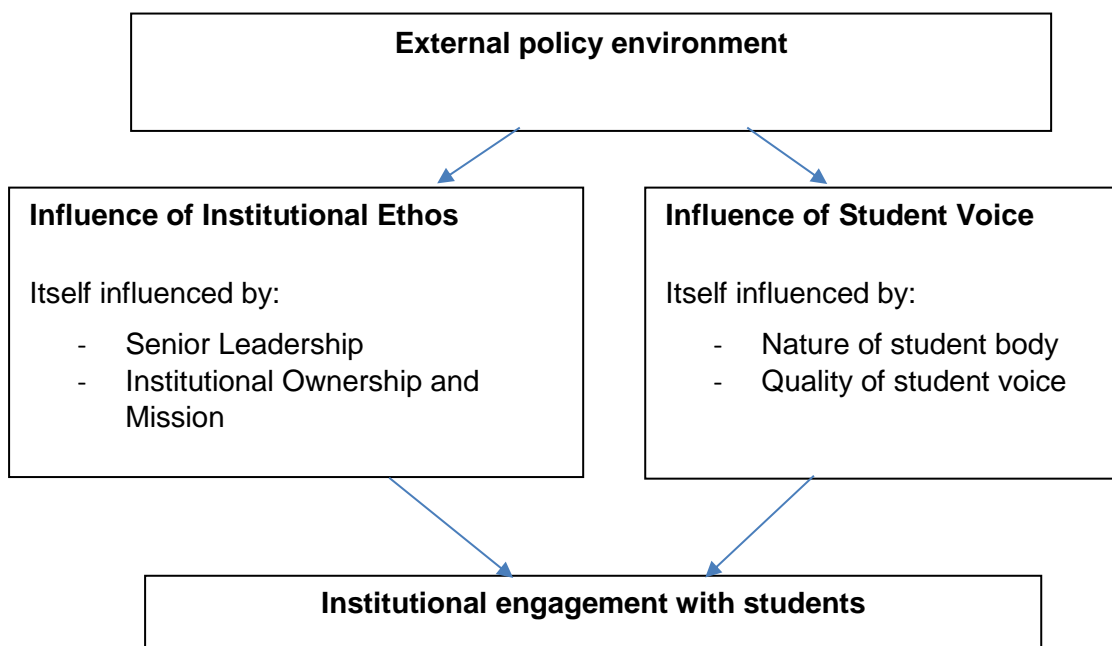


Figure 5: Overview of relationships between factors influencing institutional engagement with students

With external policy recognised as influencing all generative factors that generate institutional engagement with students, a theoretical model has been formed which gives, for at least the five alternative providers included, an overview of the generative mechanisms and their interactions that explain the engagement behaviours and attitudes in the institutions. The limitation of the size of the study should be understood, specifically noting that the institutions included were selected according to specific criteria, which do not apply to all alternative providers.

5.3 Institutional engagement with students in alternative providers in the context of policy

The findings as set out in 5.1 and 5.2 show that whilst the methods to engage students are not unusual, there are some substantial differences between institutional engagement with students in alternative providers when compared to institutions in the traditional sector (Little et al., 2009, Pimentel Botas et al., 2013). Most notably, within the alternative providers included in this research at least, independent students' union arrangements do not exist (5.2.5), student representatives are often selected rather than elected (5.1.1), and student leaders are often appointed by the institution (5.1.1). In all institutions there is some aspect of the student voice which is more or less strongly owned by the institution, rather than by the students (5.2.5). These findings lead to the realisation that mechanisms that in traditional institutions rely on an independent student voice, should not be assumed to function in the same manner in

alternative providers. This has implications for the reliance by institutions and the sector on the student voice in quality management and governance.

Current policy proposals (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016) illustrate a heavy reliance on the student voice both in relation to student protection in alternative providers as part of the intention to ease entry of alternative providers into the higher education market, and quality assurance mechanisms. Quality assurance has been under review since 2015 (HEFCE) when proposals were made to move away from external reviews undertaken by review teams consisting of peer reviewers (staff and students) from other institutions, to a system whereby institutions undertake institutional review within their own governance arrangements. The proposed principle of an internal institutional review of quality of provision relies on both governance and quality assurance mechanisms, which, as this research has shown, cannot be assumed to include an independent student voice in alternative providers. Without an independent student voice, the evaluation of the quality of educational provision relies only on consultative student involvement within structures designed by the institution, and is undertaken by staff or student representatives who are not independent (5.2.4). Even the use of a student written submission into the evidence base of an institutional review as is traditionally the case (QAA, 2013) will rely on selected or otherwise not independent student representation. Hence, as a consequence of these systemic differences, the proposed quality mechanisms may not be reliable within alternative providers.

The lack of independence of an institutionally owned student voice must be seen in relation to the known weaknesses in the representative nature of students' unions in traditional institutions, which tends to be biased towards full-time undergraduate students (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013, Little et al., 2009). However, it is not clear that the selective and appointed nature of the representational systems in alternative providers avoid this challenge; it may, rather, be an additional challenge to the representative nature of the student voice. This finding makes a contribution to the literature that already exists on the contested nature of the student voice, in that it illustrates how in a previously relatively unexplored part of the higher education sector, new types of challenges to the student voice have arisen.

In relation to entry into the higher education market this research also raises questions about the level of student protection required for students in alternative providers. Current proposals (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016) include reference to protection for students when providers fail and close down. Unless alternative arrangements are made either to establish an independent student voice (which may require legal change) or to

recast quality assurance mechanisms, student protection may also need to include new and additional arrangements for protection of students during their studies. Without an independent voice, students are otherwise not able to ensure that structural concerns are being addressed and may consequently experience underachievement or failure, without the institution itself being at any risk of withdrawal from provision.

This research has established that the principle of an independent student voice is not adhered to in alternative providers, but it has also been shown that external policy is a pervasive influence in alternative providers (5.2.6) with substantial impact on all major drivers for engagement with students. So whilst policy on quality assurance and student protection in relation to market entry cannot rely on an independent student voice, external policy is also the most likely route for ensuring that an independent student voice becomes established practice in alternative providers that intend to acquire degree awarding powers. This may involve changes to current legislation so that students' unions are also established in alternative providers.

I would suggest that the alternative providers in this research could be conceived of as a control group. This allows comparison between a group of institutions that is subject to a legal requirement to arrange for the establishment of an independent student voice which has governance influence (the traditional universities), and a group where this is not the case (the alternative providers). This research shows that whilst the conceptual understanding is present and policy at the level of guidance and external scrutiny exists, without a legal requirement is put upon institutions, alternative providers have not proceeded to establish independent collective student voice arrangements themselves. However, there are limitations to the research undertaken for this thesis which limit the credibility of this claim, and further research is required to confirm this finding.

This chapter has shown the findings relating to the research questions, discussed in the context of literature and prior research undertaken. A summary of main findings, future research indications and limitations of the research undertaken are set out in the final chapter.

6 Conclusion

Policy changes in the UK Higher Education sector in recent years have meant an increased role for private institutions (Fielden et al., 2010, Hughes et al., 2013). With active proposals to enhance alternative providers' ability to enter the UK market and gain degree awarding powers and university title (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016), a deeper understanding of academic practices in the private sector has become a matter of urgency. This research has looked at one aspect of academic practice. Institutional engagement with students has been explored in five institutions which fall within the group of alternative providers that have degree awarding powers or are working towards such recognition. Student engagement in alternative providers has not previously been addressed in the research literature.

Noting the reliance of current and proposed policy on the presence of student voice involvement in quality management and governance, I posed two research questions: *'What methods of institutional engagement with students occur in private institutions in England?'* and *'What motivations influence the nature and arrangements of institutional engagement with students?'*

The ontology and epistemology of the research are grounded in Critical Realism (Collier, 1994, Bhaskar, 2011, Vincent and Wappshot, 2014, Meyer and Lunnay, 2013). Five institutional profiles have been developed from four interviews within each institution, thus allowing insight into the structures and generative mechanisms embedded in the institutions to engage with students (Maxwell, 2012). The four research participants interviewed in each institution were a Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching), a Senior Leader (Quality), an Academic Leader and the Student Voice Leader, who was in some cases a member of staff and in other cases a student. These four participants were selected to combine a direct response from the student voice representation, with quality informed insights (QAA, 2012a), whilst also covering academic (Van Der Velden, 2013a) and institutional leadership inputs (Trowler, 2013). Interview findings were evaluated alongside external review reports (QAA, 2015a) pertaining to the institutions at hand. The transcribed interviews were analysed against a set of codes developed from a –since evolved- evaluation model previously used in research undertaken by myself and colleagues (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013). The evaluation model covers five aspects of institutional engagement with students: student voice arrangements (2.2.1), student involvement in governance (2.2.2), student involvement in quality assurance (2.2.3), student involvement in quality enhancement (2.2.4) and the perceived role of students within the institution (2.2.5). The now tested

and refined framework of institutional engagement evaluation offers a broader insight into engagement questions than has emerged from the existing research literature which tends to focus on student engagement rather than institutional engagement.

Findings from each institution were recorded and analysed against each of the aspects of engagement with students, leading to five institutional profiles (Maxwell, 2012). These in turn were used to answer the research questions.

6.1 Research findings

The main finding against the first research question on methods of institutional engagement with students, was that alternative providers do not use substantially different methods of engagement than traditional providers (5.1). There is in fact much cross institutional comparability that does not differentiate between types of providers. Common methods prevalent in alternative providers show a substantial reliance on surveys, focus groups, direct feedback and governance involvement at levels not different to those in traditional providers (Brennan et al., 2003, Little et al., 2009). However, especially in alternative providers who are preparing for, or already have degree awarding powers, the nature of engagement is mostly consultative (5.2.4) and the real difference between traditional and alternative providers lies in the different nature of student representation (5.1.1), with traditional providers' student representation arrangements subject to HE Law (Government, 1994). Moreover, where the existing literature shows traditional institutions are aiming to work towards partnership or stakeholder engagement for their students (Van Der Velden et al., 2013b), this is not the case in alternative providers where the student voice is rarely independent. Whilst in traditional institutions representation is mostly elected and independent students' unions exist (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013), in alternative providers the representational arrangements are more strongly owned, arranged and overseen by the institution (5.2.5). There were many examples of selected and appointed representatives (5.1.1) and none of the alternative providers involved in this research featured independent students' unions (5.2.5). Whilst this does not take away from the level of involvement of the student voice, this research does show how the quality of the student voice in alternative providers is consultative (5.2.4) and feeds into an educational service delivery ethos in most cases (5.2.2).

In response to the second research question, motivations, drivers and mechanisms (3.6) that generate institutional engagement with student practices in alternative providers were drawn from the institutional profiles and put in a context of existing research literature and policy reports. This allowed me to propose a theoretical model

(5.2.6) which may have relevance to the evaluation of other alternative providers in future. I also offer a number of observations which clarify how alternative providers engage with students and how internal and external factors such as policy (5.2.6) and changes in the student body (5.2.4) lead to new practices, behaviours and attitudes concerning institutional engagement with students.

Particularly worth noting is the finding of the indirect but pervasive nature of the ownership and mission of individual alternative providers (5.2.2) and the influence this has on engagement with students. The research literature (McGettigan, 2013, Levy, 2013) suggests that a relatively straightforward division exists between for-profit and not for-profit higher education providers, and between public providers and private providers. Such divisions are often explained from learning from US and South American contexts (Collini, 2013, Levy, 1986) where funding and policy contexts are substantially different. Neither of the suggested divisions turn out to exist as straightforwardly in UK Higher Education provision, even allowing for the realisation that it is often not the legal set up of the alternative provider itself, but its ownership that matters. The latter is a point that both Andrew McGettigan and Stephan Collini have made to explain why not for-profit institution can still be for-profit in outlook. On closer inspection I found that the specific mission of an institution may still have more influence than its ownership, and the ethos presented by senior leadership can mitigate against any commercial interests of for-profit owners.

In summary, my research shows the picture to be more complex. The engagement of institutions with their students depends rather more on institutional mission, the nature of the student body and the influence of national policy, than on the financial interest reflected in the type of ownership and funding of an institution. Hence it is not the case that for-profit ownership in itself leads the institutional ethos towards an educational service provision model without student partnership, nor that not-for-profit ownership can be assumed to encourage a relationship of partnership between the student body and the institution. In the context of an awareness of general mistrust of for-profit owned private providers by the traditional sector, this finding is important.

Similarly, the suggestion often made by recent policy makers that alternative providers are a necessary source of innovation and a more student focused provision of higher education is also not supported by this research. Whilst there was some evidence of innovative practice in relation to engagement with students, I did not find a huge prevalence of innovation and alternative approaches as policy makers suggest (BIS, 2016). Moreover, this research gave ample evidence of isomorphism. Whilst there was

some coercive isomorphism (compliance with policy), there was substantial evidence of mimetic isomorphism which at least in substantial parts, was voluntary. This finding suggest that the innovative intentions of alternative providers should not be overestimated, at least for engagement with students.

The research undertaken for this thesis took place at a time of considerable Higher Education sector wide policy development in the UK (BIS, 2011, 2012, 2015d, BIS, 2016) including policy development relating to the status, size and future growth of alternative providers (BIS, 2013, 2015a, 2015d, BIS, 2016). Much of the policy discussions are cast in terms of the interests of students, including student protection and rights, engagement of students with learning opportunities and the ability of institutions to engage and respond to their students' needs and interests. In the discussions about 'students at the heart of the [higher education] system' (BIS, 2011) and teaching excellence (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016) the assumption made is that an independent, reliable and active student voice is present in institutions to inform quality assurance, enhancement and governance of the student learning experience. However, this study has found that in alternative providers the presence of an independent student voice cannot systemically be relied upon. Although my research found no evidence of institutions actively influencing or steering the representation of student interests and needs, (on the contrary, there were examples of a critical voice being actively invited (4.1, 4.3)), I did find evidence of institutions and senior staff not being aware of the lack of independence of student voice and representation, caused by the selection, appointment and/or fee waiving for representatives. This suggests that alternative providers have a systemic weakness in their ability to engage with a valid, reliable and representative student voice when engaging with representatives or student collectives.

Whilst I did not set out to add to the literature on the contested nature of the student voice, this research does in fact make a contribution in relation in that aspect. Fielding (2004) in his work on student voice in schools, refers to the desirability of a dialogical model of exchange between staff and students, based on reciprocity and in structural spaces which are co-owned by staff and students. In schools and universities he recognises the inequality of staff and students and the ownership of dialogical space by staff owned cultures. My research has shown that in alternative provision, that dialogic exchange is even more owned by the institution, working within a culture of growing performativity and competition, and that reciprocal engagement is rarely enabled by alternative providers –even when the alternative provider is a not for-profit organisation.

As Ashwin (2008) contended, student agency is easily overemphasised and this research adds to the literature by showing this is also the case in alternative provision.

The implications of this research then, can be found in relation to extending existing research literature and to current policy considerations which include intentions to ease private providers' entry into the higher education market subject to enhanced student protection. To achieve this protection, closer consideration of the ability of the student body in alternative providers to assert itself may be required. In particular, the introduction in law of a requirement to establish independent students' unions should be considered for alternative providers, akin to the requirements on traditional universities. Furthermore, with regard to the design and development of future quality assessment arrangements, this research shows it would be advisable to take on board the fact that engagement practices in alternative providers may not be the same as in traditional providers.

6.2 Reflections on the research

With the major research activity concluded and research findings summarised, the limitations of the research must be clarified and new research challenges suggested. This chapter and indeed, the thesis as a whole then concludes with an overview of my professional and academic learning resulting from my research journey on the DBA programme.

6.2.1 Limitations and opportunities for further research

Whilst the implications of this study can be identified both for current policy considerations and for our understanding of student engagement, the research was undertaken on a relatively small scale, with five institutions only. Hence care must be taken when applying insights from this research to other providers. Certainly, the research by Fielden et al (2010) recognises a wide range of types of alternative provision. The findings of this thesis only apply to UK-owned alternative providers offering accredited or self-awarded full-time undergraduate degrees. Moreover, the institutions were selected on the grounds of having or being likely to acquire degree awarding powers in due course, and having a sizeable undergraduate, full-time student body or being part of a substantial organisation which is likely to offer continuity. Institutions of the latter kind were invited cognisant of the growth taking place in this sector at the moment. Some of the well-known, large and more established institutions did not agree to participate in the research. As these institutions are commonly understood to emulate traditional provision, it might appear reasonable to assume that the issues identified in this research do not relate to them. However, two of the

institutions that took part in the research also fall into the 'established and emulating' category and whilst both these showed more development of a collective student representative body and invited more co-ownership of the educational experience, neither had a fully independent study body. These reflections show the caution that must be exercised when using my findings for evaluation of other alternative providers.

A further consideration is required of the five aspects of engagement that I have used in this research (2.2.1- 2.2.5). Whilst they proved helpful in developing the interview questions, at the analytical stage of the research, the separation between quality assurance and enhancement added little to the analysis. In any future research, it may be better to combine these two aspects. This also means that if the findings of this study are used for any future work, caution should be exercised before using those for quality assurance and quality enhancement separately (5.1.3 and 5.1.4).

As this research has shown, the influence of external policy and quality assurance scrutiny on institutional engagement practices is considerable (5.2.6). One consequence of this is that, at a time when new policy is being considered, the relevance of this research may change fast. If higher education legislation changes to ensure requirements that apply to publicly funded institutions also apply to alternative HE providers (BIS, 2015d, BIS, 2016), institutional engagement with students in alternative providers may change fast. If that were to occur, this research could provide a useful baseline for comparison, allowing evaluation of the impact of new policy. However, if policy or legislation changes lead to alteration of current student representation arrangements in alternative providers, it also means that the findings of this study will only be relevant to a specific time period in higher education.

Future research questions that may come out of this study include the testing of the robustness of the conceptual framework I have introduced. A wider range of institutions could be evaluated in order to validate the framework, refine it and expand it as appropriate. Moreover, underneath the framework lies a definition of engagement in terms of efforts by the institution rather than the students, a conceptual change of approach inspired by a conversation with my supervisor Professor Geoff Whitty, who related my considerations to those he encountered in one of his own policy research endeavours (Whitty and Wisby, 2007). Through the use of this less traditional focus on institutional attitudes, practices and motivations, a different angle has been developed to researching student engagement. Institutions in the UK and increasingly in Australia are looking to enhance engagement with students and the wider aspects that influence such engagement, such as organisational culture and ethos, have so far achieved

limited attention. Whilst work has been done to explore consumerist, partnership and other positioning of students, the influence institutions have on promoting, changing or diversifying such attitudes remains limited.

6.2.2 Research journey

My own research journey started some time before I became involved in the DBA and mostly involved writing for publication, sometimes collaboratively, generally involving professional reflections and evaluations rather than structured research based on data gathering. The DBA provided a much better understanding of research design and epistemology. The DBA assignments helped me develop proficiency in research design and methodology as well as academic writing. In the first year my biggest learning concerned the academic writing, which invariably includes stating limitations, and posing questions that lead to the opening up of a topic towards further questions and perhaps, answers. The very opposite nature of writing for professional purposes initially inhibited successful academic writing. Professional writing for reviews, institutional decision making and especially governance purposes requires the author to close arguments down, lead discussions towards given options and write in a style which is perhaps best typified as 'closed'. By converting my first assignment into a peer reviewed publication (Van Der Velden, 2012a), I slowed down my DBA progress by a year, but worked to improve such academic writing 'the hard way'.

Intending to increase my understanding of typical academic pressures for professional reasons, I was then pleased to be successful in gaining research funding. Although the fund was small and was narrowly commissioned to capture policy implementation, it allowed me to work in a small research group, engage in the necessary methodological and analysis debates and analyse a considerable amount of institutional data. The resulting publications have been used for this thesis research, and have also led to me being involved in some national policy debates, presentations and keynote addresses (Pimentel Botas et al., 2013, Van Der Velden et al., 2013b).

The thesis itself took some time to develop, partly due to personal circumstances, partly due to the problems encountered with finding institutions willing to engage. When this happened I realised, to my surprise, how much easier it is in my field to have a professional standing rather than an academic one, noting how suspicious some of the alternative providers were of research being undertaken in their institutions by academic researchers deemed to be 'traditional'. Due to my own policy involvement it was no doubt easier to gain access, with some participants viewing the interview as a good opportunity to discuss policy developments off line.

Much as I anticipated, after having done the research methodology assignment prior to the thesis, the discussion of epistemology caused the greatest intellectual challenge and consequently, the most intense learning. The tension between the intellectual habitus of a professional and the – to my mind liberating – stance of critical realism was taxing. Having spent many a weekend with yet another Critical Realism book, I parked ontology and epistemology for a few weeks whilst the academic and professional part of my brain worked on re-unification. I had set out to learn the academic habitus, but found my professional stance changed considerably along the way. The genie did not want to be ordered back into the bottle and this had consequences in my professional life, ultimately leading to a new post that offers me academic freedom. For me, developing academic proficiency meant accepting a greater insecurity of direction for some considerable time, which simultaneously gave me more space for exploration and discovery. A number of meaningful conversations with academic colleagues took place regarding the research process and I took to heart their advice that ‘a good thesis is a finished thesis’. I brought the exploration of data back to the research questions I had drafted in the early stages and introduced a more developed structure to the writing up of findings. Initially this was too detailed and extensive (exhaustive even) but with advice from my supervisors I revised my approach to be more manageable and accessible.

One unexpected outcome of the DBA journey has been the learning from engagement with fellow students. Our discussions have taught me so very much more about higher education in an international context than I could have learned in any other way. Our joint hunger for learning, our openness to constructive critique, our very lively exchanges and debates and the explorations of the whys and wherefores of each other’s educational systems have been a major inspiration. Peer-engagement has also ensured many of us ‘stayed the course’ and have finished or are about to finish each of our research journeys. This peer engagement is worthy of another research project in itself.

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Appendix 1 - Interview Schedule

Interview schedule (annotated in Critical Realism context)

Part I fact checking	
1. <i>Does the institution receive public funding other than through the student loan book?</i> (my definition of included institutions)	If it does, it does not fall within the definition of private provider (exceptions may apply which will need explanation) Capturing practice and position
2. <i>Has the institution undergone course designation approval or institutional review process? When? What was the outcome?</i>	Designation process ensures national policy (QA) comparability Practice, position
3. <i>Has the institution undergone QAA Educational Oversight or Institutional Review process? When? What was the outcome?</i>	Relates to embeddedness of national policy expectations for private providers. Gives indicator of the ability of institution to develop practices independently.
4. <i>Does the institution offer any full degree courses?</i> (Using Fielden et al definitions here and below)	To ensure a whole student learning experience can be considered and QA arrangements fall under national expectations. Only full degree offering institutions fall within the research design.
5. <i>How many degree courses does the institution have, and at what level (postgraduate, first degree or other undergraduate)?</i> A postgrad degree is any degree for which entry requires a first degree. A first degree generally carries the title 'Bachelors of' and sits at level 6 in the UK FHEQ and can include relevant prof qualifications. Other undergrad includes all sub degree HE including CertHE, DipHE, HND, HNC,	Size of enterprise is relevant to the type of institutional engagement with students (see prior research for QAA). Capturing practice and position, also structure and power

foundation degrees and professional qualifications (Fielden et al).	
6. <i>How many students taking part in these?</i>	As above
7. <i>Which subjects are covered?</i>	Vocational student body interest vs academic student body interest (see prior research for QAA) May give explanation for mechanisms if a more diverse range of subjects are taught.
8. <i>What is the most accurate description of the type of the organisation:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>private, for-profit company, wholly UK owned;</i> <i>private for-profit company, international ownership;</i> <i>private, not-for profit company/charity;</i> <i>campus of non-UK university or college;</i> <i>private subsidiary of a public institution.</i> 	Contextual understanding (structure, power) required to include or eliminate reasons that influence mechanisms and tendencies of institutional engagement with students (critical realism epistemology). Structural and power aspects may provide causal reasons for mechanism of institutional engagement with students.
Part 2: institutional engagement with students	
Context and embeddedness	
9. How long has the institution offered degree courses?	To establish context, allowing me to see whether generative mechanisms and tendencies may have formed, beyond initial practices and events.
10. <i>Has there been any specific debate or discussion in the institution about how students' views and opinions are to be engaged with?</i> Follow up: <i>If there was, what triggered this discussion? What was considered during the debate? What were the outcomes?</i>	To explore the reasons to establish arrangements for institutional engagement. (structure, power, generative mechanisms and tendencies)
Student Voice	
11. <i>Thinking of the student learning experience specifically, what</i>	Initial question to establish position and practice in institution by interviewee.

<p><i>arrangements are in place in your institution to allow it to understand the interests, views and opinions of its student body?</i></p> <p>Cues: student representation, surveys, appointed student officer(s), focus groups, data analysis</p> <p>Follow up: <i>How did the current situation develop? Where might the institution go next?</i></p>	<p>Follow up questions to establish position and practice. Also structure, power, tendencies and generative mechanisms.</p>
<p>Question 12 & 13: If the institution has direct involvement of students in their organisation (elected students/ selected students/collective representation) ask the A questions. If not, use the B questions</p>	
<p>Governance: informal and formal</p> <p>12. A <i>Please can you describe how students are involved in the formal governance of the institution?</i></p> <p>B. <i>How does the institution ensure itself in its governance activity that student interests are understood and taken into account as is felt appropriate?</i></p> <p>Cues: from formal committee structure to informal communication with senior managers of the student learning experience?</p> <p>Follow up: <i>How did the current situation develop? What was the institution trying to achieve?</i></p>	<p>Collecting events to help understanding of generative mechanism and tendencies (across several interviews)</p> <p>Collecting explanation (reason), understanding generative mechanism and tendency</p>
<p><i>What is the highest level of decision making within the organisation? And what is the highest level of academic decision</i></p>	<p>Question added after pilot interview to capture possible influence of owning organisation on institutional practices.</p>

<i>making? How (if at all) is the student voice representation at these levels?</i>	(generative mechanisms, tendencies, position and power)
<p>Quality Assurance</p> <p>13. A. <i>How are student representatives involved in the evaluation of the student learning experience?</i></p> <p>B. <i>What does the institution do to understand students' interest when evaluating the quality of the academic student experience?</i></p> <p>Follow up: How did these mechanisms develop? What was the institution aiming to achieve specifically with the current arrangements? How are student views and inputs received?</p>	<p>Collecting events to help understanding of generative mechanism and tendencies (across several interviews)</p> <p>Collecting explanation (reason), understanding generative mechanism and tendency.</p>
<p>Enhancement</p> <p>14. <i>How does your institute engage students in the development of the student learning experience?</i></p> <p>Follow up: How did you develop these approaches? How do the management and academic community experience their input?</p>	<p>Collecting events to help understanding of generative mechanism and tendencies (across several interviews)</p> <p>Collecting explanation (reason), understanding generative mechanism and tendency</p>
<p>Perceived role of students</p> <p>15. <i>Does your institution take a particular approach to how it communicates with students about the student learning experience?</i></p> <p>Cues: Partnership, Experts, Stakeholders, Consumers, Clients, other?</p> <p>Follow up: How might you think the academic community in your institution describe students? For instance in their</p>	<p>Collecting explanation (interviewee/ institution) for generative mechanism construction</p> <p>Collecting explanation (reason), understanding generative mechanism and tendency</p>

daily engagement with students? How would your top level board or committee describe students?	
<p>16. <i>If you were to hazard a guess, what might future developments in your institution be, in relation to engaging students?</i></p> <p>Cues: new regulation, introduction of student loan book effects, competition with other institutions, influence of immigration controls (for alternative providers with international interests), QAA developments?</p>	<p>Understanding explanations, generative mechanisms, tendencies</p> <p>Understand reason, structure and position (power?)</p>
<p>17. <i>Is there anything you have observed in terms of how your institution engages with students that we have not discussed yet?</i></p> <p>Cues: QAA student engagement policy (B5 Code of Practice), Alternative providers and new regulation</p>	

Appendix 2 – Consent to interview

Institutional Engagement with students - in the private sector: Information for interview participants

The Research

The purpose of this research is to study how institutions organize their engagement with students. The role of students has changed considerably in institutions due to the introduction of higher level fees, national ranking pressures and development of student engagement policy by the QAA and others. Whilst there has been research into how institutions engage with their student body in the traditional sector, there has been very little research into the new approaches to engagement with students in the private sector. Due to some previous research for the QAA I have become aware how much innovative work is taking place in the private sector (for profit as well as not for profit) and this has triggered my interest (<http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/student-engagement/qaa-student-engagement-project-2012-13.html>). I will be exploring quality assurance, governance and teaching enhancement particularly.

The Researcher

My name is Gwen van der Velden. I am a Doctor of Business Administration student at the University of Bath specializing in HE management <http://www.bath.ac.uk/management/dba/>. I am also the Director of Learning and Teaching Enhancement at the University of Bath where I am responsible for quality management, academic staff development, e-learning and academic and professional skills development for students. At national level I am engaged in policy development on student engagement and the future of the National Students Survey.

My research supervisors are:

Dr Rajani Naidoo http://www.bath.ac.uk/management/faculty/rajani_naidoo.html and Professor Geoff Whitty, <http://www.bath.ac.uk/management/faculty/geoff-whitty.html>

The Process

Your participation in the study will involve an interview during which I will ask questions about practices and considerations in your institution. The interview can be done by telephone or in person and will be recorded and transcribed, unless requested otherwise by you. Participation is voluntary and you have the right to terminate the interview at any time.

Insights gathered from you and other participants will be used for a qualitative research thesis, which will be read by my academic supervisors, graduate committee, examiners and made available through the University of Bath library. The research may also be submitted for publication. **Though direct quotes from you may be used in the paper, your name and institution name will be kept anonymous.**

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns at any time.

G.M.Vandervelden@bath.ac.uk or 01225 383775

Risk

This study poses little to no risk to its participants. I will ensure that confidentiality is maintained by not citing your actual name within the paper or relate your remarks to your institution's name. You may choose to leave the study at any time, and may also request that any data collected from you not be used in the study.

Many thanks indeed for your willingness to take part in this research.

Appendix 3 - Coding Schedule

The Coding schedule is based on the five aspects identified in the thesis that shape the way institutions seek to interact with their students in relation to their academic experience.

1. the arrangements supported by the institution to organise the representation of student views, opinions and interests. In the literature this is often referred to as 'the student voice', suggesting this aspect could be called the *student voice aspect*. The representation arrangements are further divided as set out below.
2. the ways of engaging the student voice in the formal and informal institutional decision making, or the '*governance aspect*',
3. any arrangements to engage students in the evaluation and consideration of the quality of the academic student experience or '*quality assurance aspect*',
4. the arrangements made to engage students in the development of the academic student experience or '*enhancement aspect*', and
5. the *perceived role of students within institutions* as shown in the way students are communicated with (and about) in the context of the listed aspects.

The sixth group of codes refers to institutional organisational aspects that are particular to private institutions, as such aspects may influence the nature of institutional engagement with students.

Other findings worth noting are also listed either under 'Future Developments' (7) for interview content relating to future student engagement developments already in train or anticipated, both within the institution and nationally, or as 'Other'.

1. Student Voice

- 1.1. Data Student Voice: the student voice is gathered from data
- 1.2. Informal Student Voice: the student voice is heard through informal routes
- 1.3. Surveys Student Voice: the student voice is invited through surveys
- 1.4. Representation arrangement for Student Voice
 - 1.4.1. Selected Student Representation: student representatives are selected by the institution
 - 1.4.2. Elected Stud Representation: student representatives are elected by other students
 - 1.4.3. Other or changing stud representation
- 1.5. Other Student Voice: the student voice is presented through other means

than listed above

2. Involvement in Governance

- 2.1. Discipline level L&T governance involvement: the student voice is present in formal or informal governance at the level of discipline or programmes
- 2.2. Exec & Strat governance involvement: the student voice is present in formal and informal governance at executive and/or strategic institutional level
- 2.3. Faculty School L&T governance involvement: the student voice is present in informal and formal governance at faculty/ school/ other intermediate level
- 2.4. Finance governance involvement: the student voice is present in the formal and informal governance of finance and resource
- 2.5. HR related governance involvement: the student voice is present in the formal and informal governance of HR
- 2.6. Institutional level L&T governance: the student voice is present in the formal and informal governance at institutional level (excluding HR, Finance, executive and strategic)
- 2.7. Other governance involvement: the student voice is present in the formal and informal governance arrangement other than those listed above

3. Quality Assurance Involvement

- 3.1. Annual Monitoring QA involvement: students are involved in annual quality monitoring processes
- 3.2. Curriculum Development QA involvement: students are involved in the development of (new) curricula
- 3.3. Periodic Programme Review QA involvement: students are involved in the regular review of programmes and sets of programmes (beyond presentation of the student voice through surveys)
- 3.4. Programme Approval QA Involvement: students are involved in the consideration and/or approval of new programmes of study
- 3.5. Programme Survey QA involvement: students are involved in the development and/or evaluation of programme level surveys and/or students are invited to fill out programme level surveys.
- 3.6. SSLC: Staff Student liaison committees (under that name or otherwise) take place
- 3.7. Unit Evaluation QA involvement: students are invited to fill out unit level surveys and/or are involved in the evaluation and following up on unit

evaluation outcomes

3.8. Other QA involvement

4. Quality Enhancement Involvement

- 4.1. Annual report: students or their representatives develop an annual report recommending enhancement of the student learning experience
- 4.2. Consultation: students are consulted on enhancement and development intentions, plans and implementation of enhancement activity
- 4.3. Instigation of QE activity: students and/or their representatives instigate enhancement activities
- 4.4. Project involvement and working groups: students and/or their representatives are involved in enhancement projects, working groups and other activities leading to enhancement of the student learning experience
- 4.5. Other QE involvement: students and/or their representatives are involved in the enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience in ways which are not described above

5. Student Role

- 5.1. Client: students are viewed by the institution as clients of the institution
- 5.2. Customer: students are viewed as customers of the institution to which it supplies an educational experience
- 5.3. Expert: students are viewed as experts within the educational experience the institution provides
- 5.4. Stakeholder: students are viewed as stakeholders in the provision of education by the institution
- 5.5. Partner: students are partners in the institutions' efforts to provide an educational experience
- 5.6. Other Student Role: students are viewed as having a role within the institution other than those described above

6. Institutional Organisation

- 6.1. For Profit related: any evidence of for profit related motivations, beliefs, events or practices that are present in the institution
- 6.2. Highest level Boards: any interview remarks that relate to the highest levels boards, normally the executive board and academic board, as well as boards that fall outside the governance of the institution itself, but influence the direction the institution takes strategically, financially or academically, such as boards of owners and stakeholders in for profit organisations that

own not for profit institutions

- 6.3. Public funding related: any evidence of motivations, beliefs, events or practices present in the institution that relate to public funding
- 6.4. Stake holding: any evidence of beliefs, events, motivations or practices that relate to stakeholders (financial or otherwise) in the executive context
- 6.5. Other Institutional organisation: any other issues that interviewees raise that relate to how the institution engages with students relating to the way the institution is organised

7. Future developments

Any evidence of beliefs, events, motivations, practices, but also power, structure and position of the institution and actors related to the institution, that influence the future direction of the institution. Existing plans, projects and policy or strategy development for the future development of institutional engagement with students is also included.

8. Other worth noting

Any other matters raised by interviewees that relate to institutional engagement with students or may relate to institutional engagement with students that have not been coded otherwise.

Total number of codes: 49

Appendix 4 - Institution Profile A

Institution facts and sources

Institution A	Facts		Source
1. Does the institution receive public funding other than through the student loan book? (my definition of included institutions)	No 1104 tuition fee loans to this institution's students in 2012/13	Interview (Academic Leader and Senior Leader (Quality)) http://www.slc.co.uk/official-statistics/full-catalogue-of-official-statistics/student-support-for-higher-education-in-england.aspx Supplementary tables - Breakdown of payments in academic years 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 by individual Higher Education provider Designated: National Statistics Published on 28 January 2014	
2. Does the institution offer any full degree courses? 3. How many degree courses does the institution have, and at what level (postgraduate, first degree or other undergraduate) A postgraduate degree is any degree for which entry requires a first degree. A first degree generally carries the title 'Bachelors of' and sits at level 6 in the UK FHEQ and can include relevant professional qualifications. Other undergraduate includes all sub degree HE including CertHE, DipHE, HND, HNC,	Yes, an estimated 30-40 in the area of Business & Management (including Finance, Marketing and Accounting), Law and Health, each with several programmes related to 'the Professions' as the institution calls them. There is also a School for Foundation programmes and English, which does not offer full undergraduate (Bachelors) degrees.		Estimation of programmes by interview (Academic Leader), programmes and disciplines provided as per interview and Institutional University website. Institutional page on Unistats (2014/15):

<p>foundation degrees and professional qualifications (Fielden et al)</p> <p>4. Which subjects are covered?</p>	<p>18 courses listed on Unistats, including Bachelors and undergraduate Masters</p>	<p>http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/institutions/</p>
<p>5. How many students taking part in these?</p>	<p>Approximately 10.000 (2014/15 estimate)</p>	<p>Dean interview. HESA does not provide data on private institutions</p>
<p>6. How long has the institutions offered (whole) degree courses?</p>	<p>In 2007 the institution was awarded degree awarding powers by the UK's Privy Council. In 2010 the institution was granted University College status and changed its name accordingly. In 2013 it met the criteria for full university title, and carried the University title since then.</p>	<p>institutional website statement on history of the institution</p>
<p>7. Has the institution undergone QAA Educational Oversight process or Institutional Review? When? What was the outcome? Which process was used?</p>	<p>Full Institutional Audit in 2012. Met all expectations, no commendations.</p>	<p>QAA Institutional review document for this institution</p>
<p>8. Any institutional engagement with students observations from QAA reports?</p>	<p>Affirmation of actions to take were identified by the QAA in relation to student engagement.</p> <p>Student representation deemed 'not yet mature' (2.12)</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>9. What is the most accurate description of the type of the organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - private, for-profit company, wholly UK owned; 	<p>Private for profit company owned, but the university itself is not for profit. Any profits are reinvested in the growth of the institution.</p>	<p>Interview with Academic Leader, QAA documentation and institutional website</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - private for-profit company, international ownership; - private, not-for profit company/charity; - campus of non-UK university or college; - private subsidiary of a public institution 	<p>The staff make reference to the organisation as for profit company rather than a charity (or other not for profit), and this is also set out in a business ethics statement by the VC which sets out how the University does its business.</p>	
Classification of UK private providers by function (Porter et al):		
<p><i>Delivery of Academic content</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering own degrees (using UK degree awarding powers) • Offering own non-UK degree (with accreditation overseas) • Offering own award in partnership with UK institution • Offering an award from a UK institution • Offering own certificated module within (or alongside) a partner university's degree programme • Offering own (overseas) online awards (with no UK face to face support) • Partnership in online course delivery 	<p>Offering own degrees, has degree awarding powers and full University status</p>	
<p><i>Academic support for international students in the UK</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Language and study skills training • Foundation year programmes • First year programme • Pre-Master's programmes 	<p>Whilst one of the Schools offers this type of support (English Language and Foundation) this has not been the focus of the interviews</p>	

<i>Partnerships in providing content</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Production of course materials under subcontract</i> • <i>Provision of online modules to fit within an institution's virtual learning environment</i> 	Does not apply	
<i>Other types of relationship</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Partnership with private sector in continuing professional development design and delivery for third party clients</i> • <i>Contracted tutorial support in the UK and overseas</i> • <i>Educational testing and assessment services in specialist fields</i> • <i>Granting of accreditation or quality assurance services in professional or technical fields</i> • <i>Agreed articulation into a university's degree programmes from qualifications awarded by a private provider</i> 	CPD in place for bar exams and similar. This has not been the focus of the interviews or document research.	

Outline of governance structure:

'The Academic Council – *the most senior body with responsibility for our academic governance and policy, standards and quality. The Academic Council has a voting majority of independent members who represent the wider UK Higher Education sector. No award of the institution can be made without the approval of the Academic Council. The powers of the Academic Council are contained within the regulations devolved by the Board of Directors.*

The Board of Directors – operates in partnership with the Academic Council on matters relating to academic provision. The Board of Directors is chaired by a Senior Non-Executive Director and includes both executive and non-executive directors. The Board of Directors have devolved powers to the Academic Council in relation to academic matters.

The Education and Training Committee – is the engine room of the University's committee structure and the most senior internal academic committee. The Education Training Committee reports directly to the Academic Council.

The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Committee – acts as a cross-University forum for capturing, developing and disseminating best practice. The current strategy for Learning and Teaching at the University can be found here [link removed for confidentiality]

School Boards – the main conduit for our academic voice, central to monitoring standards and quality. Each School has its own board comprising of members of faculty, students and supporting staff.

Programme Committee, Module Teams, Staff Student Liaison Committee – these review and preview delivery and identify and act upon any immediate initiatives or issues.'

Source: text taken from university webpages (governance structure). This governance structure was confirmed during interviews as current and accurate.

QAA findings

The most recent review of this institution took place in 2012 in the form of an Institutional review (source from QAA website: Institutional Review reports). In that academic year, student involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement was the thematic element for all institutions reviewed.

The report records the relatively new arrangements in place, mostly under the leadership of the Chief Executive of Students (a role established two years previously) and noted that student involvement is evolving and maturing at the point of the review. In 2012 the Chief Executive of Students was supported by 10 elected Student Association Branch Presidents (the institution being a multi-site organization) and 12 elected Student Voice representatives who sit on committees. Involvement in committees is fully in place, with student representatives holding full membership and voting rights. Major committees have a standing item for the Student Voice on their agenda as a matter of course. Staff Student Liaison Committees are in place and deemed effective. Attendance of student representatives on School boards is intermittent and formal inclusion at these boards (including in records) is limited. The student voice arrangements are deemed not to be sufficiently matured as yet, and the review panel therefore affirmed the institution's intention to progress in this aspect.

The QAA report notes that a Student Charter is in place and the institution meets the relevant expectations on communicating and agreeing the charter with students. However, students are found not to view it as a meaningful document and the institution was advised to increase its visibility to students. The institution does not take part in the NSS. The review team noted that the institution publicizes its own satisfaction data instead, using language which the review team notes '*could be taken as misleading*'. The team also noted that students reported how their internal student satisfaction feedback has led to real improvements.

The report confirms that in quality assurance terms the student voice is present in the now traditional processes of module and programme evaluation, programme review, external examiners reports and annual monitoring, but noted that the institution should ensure this involves student input from all its locations. The panel noted that student (who were not representatives) were not aware of how the institution had acted on module and programme surveys. The staff experience of the current student voice arrangements were recorded as positive and supportive of the influence the student voice had on enhancement activity.

The review team recorded its discussion of the nature of the role of Chief Executive of Students and in particular their independence considering the appointment process (selection not election) and employment nature of the appointee. The institution was advised to give this further consideration.

Following the publication of the review report, the institution prepared and published an action plan (last update 2014, available from the institutional website). The action plan on student engagement focuses on better promotion of the Student Charter, increased efforts to close the student feedback loop and further alignment to the QAA Code of Practice on Student Engagement (B5). In particular monitoring mechanisms have been established to measure the effectiveness of communication with students on enhancement activity as a result of student feedback, it has been agreed that an independent students association will be established and arrangements are made to substitute student representatives for committees, where absences occur. In April 2014, the institution publicizes these actions as 'done'.

Interview findings

Using the five aspects identified in the thesis that shape the way institutions seek to interact with their students in relation to their academic experience, the institution is described below on the basis of the interviews that have taken place. Other findings worth noting are also listed.

1. the arrangements supported by the institution to organise the representation of student views, opinions and interests. In the literature this is often referred to as 'the student voice', suggesting this aspect could be called the *student voice aspect*,
2. the ways of engaging the student voice in the formal and informal institutional decision making, or the '*governance aspect*',
3. any arrangements to engage students in the evaluation and consideration of the quality of the academic student experience or '*quality assurance aspect*',
4. the arrangements made to engage students in the development of the academic student experience or '*enhancement aspect*', and
5. the *perceived role of students within institutions* as shown in the way students are communicated with (and about) in the context of the listed aspects.

1. The Student Voice within the institution

All respondents refer to the student representative system as the main route for the Student Voice to be heard. This institution has a Students' Association which has representative and non-representative functions (social/ cultural etc) and works with a number of elected student representatives, who are not sabbatical officers, but who join various governance arrangements (formal, ad hoc and informal) at both School (faculty) and institutional level. Across the institution, including representatives at discipline and programme level, there are around 300 student representatives: *'I think we've got 300 SSLC reps off the University and that's one method of effective feedback.'* (Student Voice Leader (Staff)).

A/SVL/1

The Student Voice Leader (Staff) explains his (appointed) role and that of the Students' Association as follows: *'my role is Chief Executive of Students, so it's very similar to a Student Union President role within traditional Student Unions. Mine is Chief Executive of Students at [name of institution] Students Association, so I'm the Head of the Department that deals with the Student Voice. I'm there to enhance student engagement, improve the student experience and represent the Student Voice and within my role I have elected students who are not Sabbatical Officers, so they're not full time students for the Students Association but they are elected to sit on each School Board and Committee and my role is to make sure that they understand the quality code, specifically section B5 with regards to student engagement, and that they're fully trained so that they are effective and efficient student representatives when they sit on each of the School Boards, the Committees, the Academic Council and they report through to me and I then report on to the Vice Chancellor to feed back my feedback from across all twelve of our Centres and all four of our Schools, so it's mainly a Student Voice role that is mine.'* Some of his work is also clearly on behalf of the institution: *'We take students to a Board Meeting which is £50.00 per Board Meeting. It's only a nominal sum, but we make sure they know that there is a payment there and I'm the one who then processes the payments, makes sure their travel is booked, that they do get the papers in advance and they're briefed on them. Sometimes I can help them with the briefing as well. I bring it all together. I sit on each of the Boards as*

A/SVL/2

A/SVL/3

well myself and so together with the Director of Quality we make sure that the students are aware of the election and that is it a democratic election and any student from within the University regardless of cost, type, if they're on part-time, evening or weekend, full time, part time, online, distance learning, any students international, domestic can apply for the election. An elected one where the entire body of students based on manifestos votes online.'

More strategically, the Academic Leader explains: 'historically we've had three Chief Execs and it has been an appointed role working directly for the Vice Chancellor with a weekly meeting with the Vice Chancellor to both, you know, represent student issues to [institution name], to the Senior Managers, and particularly to the Vice Chancellor, but also to implement student related issues. We've had three outstanding candidates in that role and they have pushed forward an enormous range of issues. They sit on all the Committees. They're very important powerful people. They're obviously young people. They've normally just sort of finished one of their courses. What is happening at the moment is that it's being re-defined and we're setting up a more independent Student Association that will, you know, there's a separate Board that governs that Student Association and it had its first meeting recently and I think the role is being split into two. One of them will be a democratically elected position and the other one will be a more permanent role managing student issues in the University.'

The student representatives are partly elected, partly selected. The Student Voice Leader (Staff) has experience of this mixture of elective and selective roles himself: 'I was previously an elected student on the Academic Council so we did have some sort of election. I was an elected student representative. I sat on our highest Committee, the Academic Council, and all students were invited and were informed that we do have a role which is Chief Executive of Students but that it's a role that you would have to apply for and the interviews were by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, [name], [name] Director of Quality and the former Chief Executive of Students, so I applied. That was round one. Round two was a

A/AL/1

A/SVL/4

meeting with [name] Vice Chancellor and so with an interview process ... however because I had previously been elected I was aware of the Quality Assurance systems. This is very different to a Student Union with fully democratic ... however I have democratically elected students reporting through to me. We will change that elected method because we didn't have a Student's Union, or we've not had one for many years. The 94 Education Act with regard to Unions doesn't apply to us because we are a private provider; we voluntary claim Student Association. At that stage I think an interview process worked well but the democratic element was there because I did sit on a ... I was elected prior to that to a Committee ... a Senior Committee role and all the other students are elected from each Centre.' This appointment is for 18 months to provide overlap with new incoming elected representatives.

The respondents discuss the selected rather than elected nature of student representation, but the Senior Leader (learning & Teaching) illustrates how the institution is comfortable with shared staff and student roles: *'just as an example in the true spirit of being collaborative our Chief Executive of Students and our Director of Alumni, who is a recent student himself, is involved in all of our working groups on the ... within the Learning and Teaching team and within the Equality and Diversity, Inclusion and Learning Support agenda, so we consult with them on absolutely everything.'*

The Student Voice Leader (Staff) describes his considerations for future development of the Student Voice: *'I think it's an ongoing debate; how can we improve student engagement? How can we make sure views are more, you know, we miss interviews more so. Is it through service? Is it through focus groups? Should we have specific teams ... international students, which we do and I think we are at a really good stage where we do have a lot of different mechanisms and they are codified but I think we could improve and say actually what about those students who are part time? Do we do enough for them? Do we ... could we do a bit more? Should we get a Sabbatical Officer that only deals with part time students and disabled students or international students? And I think that's the ongoing debate where I keep fighting. Potentially*

A/SLLT/1

A/SVL/5

we might need a couple more Sabbatical Officers who only have a hat on for certain represented groups, so maybe under-represented groups, but I think as an ongoing debate we do have a lot of mechanisms for student feedback. Some are informal. Some can go to their programme leader and we then have the formal ones where they can then feedback into the Vice Chancellor or to the Academic Council itself.'

The Senior Leader (Quality) reflected on the history of the Student Voice in the institution and describes anticipated changes ahead: *'In the early days we just asked people to sort of virtually self-nominate and then I think...it's a long time ago...I think we selected from them, some of them may have been elected, others who let us know they were interested would just be accepted. So we had students with very specific agendas, you know, personal agendas as well as you know, trying to represent other students, often a lack of engagement with the wider student bodies who weren't sure that the students were engaging and giving their views. We always had student-staff liaison committees, so that had always existed and the debate was 'what more than that do you need?' if they're working appropriately? (...) trying to get a student view where that student's view was informed, ideologically, sophisticated in a way that we couldn't quite imagine at the time the students would be. So this is one of the problems that some people had, was 'how will students know what is the appropriate educational method for them or a better one?' He also notes: 'I mean the early days we had very ad-hoc procedures for getting people on to committees. Now and just this year for the first time, it's handled by the Students' Association which is going to become a formal...it's now I think just become a formal student body, semi-independent of the university so before there was a Chief Executive of Students, that role is turning into a Student President role, eventually it will be elected and now it's a full time member of staff, so it's more like the Student Union...'*

He also comments: *'I think we're looking for the student association to develop and to take off and to be much larger and to be much more proactive because at the moment it's a couple of people, it's just this year become a separately*

A/SLQ/1

A/SLQ/2

independent student association, so that will grow and students will have a much greater role with that association and through it than up 'til now. They'll be much more of a voice for the students. I think from my perspective, what we want to do is develop the thematic element of what we're doing to engage students in that, engage students in predicting the future a little more, and particularly in reviews as reviews become more common.'

A/SLQ/3

The Academic Leader recognises particular drivers behind the changes ahead: *'I think the change here has been more regulatory to be honest. As you're probably aware, you know, there's a lot of expectation from QAA (...) and also from the OIA that there must be, you know, a very independent set up for students. I think where we've been slightly reticent about it is we have such a successful system that we've worked with over the last few years where we've been able to appoint absolutely outstanding candidates into the role and work very closely with the Senior Management team to make things better for students but they're not elected positions and that's what I think the regulators are probably less [impressed with].'* Changes to the structure of the Students' Association are planned, with a separation between the association and representation functions and a fully elective approach to the representative voice.

A/AL/2

Not all representation follows formal routes. Student Voice Leader (Staff) provides a clear illustration of this: *'[VC name], for example, he sometimes invites the students for afternoon tea. I think he does it at The Savoy or something, so it's a good experience for the students to be invited to a free afternoon tea. He does that outside any formal process, sends an email to the list of 17 or 20 or whatever it is and normally four or five or eight reply and he will go out with them outside the office, two or three hours on a Tuesday afternoon and speak to them and find out what their issues are and normally he will then send a few emails to each of the Deans or Programme Leaders saying 'this is what the students have said, which is great, you know, this issue's come, you know, this is the problem' (...) So there are obviously commercial benefits as well. He learns about different nationalities, cultures and things in advance of him going abroad to a certain country, but also*

A/SVL/6

ideas of new modules as well and that's an example that happened recently but he's done that quite a few times. Sometimes I will be there with my rep, sometimes I won't be there, but I'm not precious in the sense that saying every rep can only be contacted through me.'

The Student Voice Leader (Staff) promotes this more informal approach himself: *'We always try and say 'if there's a smaller issue you've got the phone number or the email of the Dean; let's go to the Dean straight away'. So that is a bigger thing, or the building managers, you know, if you can't sort it there then bring it to the Academic Council. So a lot of things informally get resolved.'* The Academic Leader volunteers a further illustration of direct contact between senior staff and students: *'we take students views very seriously and that's lead from the top by [VC name] who has a very close relationship with students and he's, you know, he welcomes them unfortunately writing [laughs] directly to him and engaging with him, you know, he will take an interest and will take them out for a coffee and chat to as many individual students as he can but, you know, we all have that perspective. I mean our building, it would be very interesting the next time you're in London (...) to drop into the [discipline name] School, I mean what you would see for instance is me as the Dean of the [discipline name] School I sit in a shared office that's directly, you know, onto a corridor full of students. So I'm a very accessible person to them and they will think nothing of just knocking on my door and coming and asking something or complaining about something and I'll get out of my chair and I'll deal with it, now from what I understand [0:39:26:1] have got at least three portcullises [0:39:31:0] I don't have a PA. I don't have any barriers. I'm very, very open to students. (...) It's a little different given the [discipline name] School's much bigger. It's on multi sites and therefore that individual's probably a little bit less accessible, but, no it's pretty typical of what we're like to honest. We are very open to the students. I would see ... I'm seeing two or three students today. It's not atypical for me to have quite a lot of direct dialogue with students and that helps keep me in touch with things.'*

A/SVL/7

A/AL/3

The Senior Leader (Quality) describes how the Student Voice is influential: *'Because when you get good students it really helps and it helps in a number of ways. You get first-hand experience of what it's like to be the student, articulated well. So it's more understandable and more...the impact is more immediate. With colleagues who from the services, like marketing, if I say this is unclear or misleading, they may not accept it as quickly as they would if a student says 'no when you say this, I understood it to mean this', so if the student body comes along and says 'no we found this course material misleading or not accurate' then the impact it has is immediate...'. But there is also a deliberate engagement with the Student Voice along an individual agenda: 'my approach would come from the QAA requires us to be absolutely transparent, morally we should be absolutely transparent and when I do the moral bit, I get the students to say it because those are the people that have (...) bought the product on the basis of the advert. And it works the other way as well – you know, lots of students have said 'look I've never seen an advert for [institution name] you know, one of my friends would've come here but they didn't know about it you know' we're not research focused, we're research informed but not research focused so people's reputation is built on there and their job security is built on their teaching ability and their teaching ability goes to care of the student, development of the student, understanding the student – so issues in the classroom, issues in delivery, issues in resourcing, that affect the students' ability to progress or their happiness with the course, are very quickly highlighted because they affect the individual directly.'*

A/SLQ/5

This respondent (Senior Leader (Quality)) also illustrated why engagement with students is important to the institution in other ways: *'I think the big thing for us was learning from our students. The new students that we didn't expect to achieve had to get in and those students were often...the straightforward 18 year old group looking to get to university, liked the fees that we were charging, often from a disadvantaged background, came to [institution name] to do a professional programme, had heard or when they began to research knew about the halo effect of the professional programmes we run with big City firms and their learning styles and needs were so entirely different from our traditional group of students that*

A/SLQ/6

we had to redesign our programmes, put in more services, you know, more staff on the ground, more student support workers, more advisors. For example, a big change was in the old days students would come in, they'd want to hit the ground running, they knew exactly where they were going, didn't want to waste any time, so from day one the programme would be quite intense, you'd expect to do a lot of work, the hours would be quite high, assessment would be quite quick, so you know, five or six weeks into the course you might be doing your first assessment, so you could be being assessed now within 10 weeks, you know, if you failed. But these were all good students, did a lot of work on their own, independent learners, post-graduates (...) mature and high achieving. The new student intake that we didn't expect to get was 18, first time away from home, couldn't cook, adjusting to living London, being alone, adjusting to learning at a HE level as opposed to level 3, and the way that they approached the syllabus and the needs that they had, caused us to completely redesign the first year of our programmes'. A similar point is made independently by the Academic Leader.

Other ways of understanding the student voice include the use of surveys as set out under the quality assurance aspect and participation in governance (formal and informal) as set out in the next section. There is limited reference to the use of *data* to understand student interests, although the Senior Leader (Learning & Teaching) does refer to retention data and student related equality data. However, she also notes that '*As far as I know the data isn't shared [with students]*'. The Academic Leader indicates there are plans to undertake more data gathering on student interests, specifically to inform the highest level of decision making (Board of Directors, non-academic) where other than the VC no academic or student representation is present: '*one of the things we're concerned about the Board of Directors is how do we present information to the Board of Directors around student experience, student satisfaction, etc, etc, you know, we have a number of surveys and metrics and measures but we're never enormously happy that we get a good enough picture from all of that, so we have got a project which I think [name] is going to lead on which will be try to create a better measure for the most senior team in [institution name] for how well we're delivering, so I mean most Board of Directors will have lots*

A/SLLT/2

A/AL/4

and lots of reports on all kinds of things and I think it is a challenge for us of how do you measure ... how do you provide, you know, a quarterly report that gives a very good indication of how well we're delivering for students and yeah obviously we can look at happy sheet scores that they tick on their teaching and facilities and experience that they have. We can read the student written submissions. We can, you know, there are various things we can do but I think we're still searching for better ways of capturing that for the top team. . (...) Well it's just for the Board of Directors to be more in touch with issues so that they can intervene better in terms of reallocation of resources, to improve things, to try to align the University to the needs of students, so one of my concerns I suppose is potentially when you have student representation is the extent to which they're talking to themselves or are they really talking to the student body and how do you ensure that an individual with a bee in his bonnet about something doesn't distract the University into a lot of investment in an area that actually people don't care very much about.'

2. Institutional Engagement with students within Governance in the institution

The governance structure is relatively uncomplicated, and students (elected) are members of all institutional and School level L&T committees but not on the highest executive board (Board of Directors): *'...they sit on all of our Committees other than the Board of Directors which I think is probably quite unusual from an organisation analysis point of view'* (Senior Leader (Learning & Teaching)). The Student Voice Leader (Staff) states: *'there's around 17 or so student representatives, two on the Law School Board, two in the Business School, and so on, so there's four Schools, two on each, two on the Academic Council, four on the Learning and Teaching Assessment Enhancement Committee, so that's one student from each School, International Agenda Working Group, Equality and Diversity Working Group, so I think it's every Board and Committee. We do have a Board of Directors which students are not on but every other one other than that, not only do we have students on them, I sit on each of them as well. I sit on over a dozen Committees'*. The Senior Leader (Quality) notes that *'[on] Every senior committee there's a student on, or two students in some cases, for like the learn/teaching*

A/SLLT/3

A/SVL/8

committee there's four, school boards as well. (...) There are now also mechanisms to get substitute students into those committees should the students elected to them not turn up, which is one of the problems we've faced.'

A/SLQ/7

Similarly the Academic Leader notes that 'We have Student Staff Liaison Committees for every programme every term. Students sit not only on the sort of QA type Committees, and there's probably a dozen Committees where students would be represented, so School Boards, Learning and Teaching Committee, Education Committee, etc, etc. (...) I'm trying to think of any Committee they wouldn't be on. I suppose they wouldn't be on something like a Professorial Appointment Committee or something like that. They are basically on all the major formal Committees of the University with the exception of the Board of Directors.'

A/AL/5

The Senior Leader (Learning & Teaching) clarifies the preparation and support available to student representatives in the governance structure: 'At every single Committee students are represented, and we actually deliver training at the beginning of the year when those student reps are elected, we go out and deliver training on what they can expect from those Committees and how best to be prepared for those Committees, so they are absolutely on the inside when it comes to our Governance.'

A/SLLT/4

The Academic Leader describes how there is some element of selection involved in governance participation: 'I think it can be mixed. I think generally we try to ... generally there's a number of students who put themselves forward for involvement and they would be assigned various sort of Committees, like Academic Council, Learning and Teaching and so on and so forth. From that group of people typically we would draw people to be part of things like Programme Approval, so there's probably a good 50 or so students who are quite active, who indicated a desire to be active and we would then use them.'

A/AL/6

There is little interest (other than curiosity) from the student point of view in joining the top level committee, as financial decisions (despite the customer led nature of the institution) are felt to be outside the student remit. Again the Student Voice Leader (Staff) said; *'I would love to be on that in that sense but I think it would be outside the remit in the sense that any cost for example would be approved by the Academic Council. The Board of Directors might then look at the resourcing of it, you know, or may just look at the financial viability of it outside an approval process so really it is a very different thing on long term company strategy and over-arching company strategy but I think it's still useful but probably not as useful as sitting on an Academic Council where the student experience is at the heart of what's happening and the day to day running and operations of the departments, but it is an interesting question and one we've previously pondered'*

All interviewees consider the level of student involvement and influence in governance structures in their institution to be higher than in other institutions. The Senior Leader (Quality) describes how student involvement in governance changed since achieving Degree Awarding Powers: *'Once we got awarding powers the emphasis was on us as an institution overseeing what we're doing and applying our own standards to everything, our minimum standards and therefore we had to work much more closely as a single entity. So we have a Deans group where we discuss things and we have a more formal committee the ATC and the Academic council and a few committees in between learning and teaching, so Deans aren't on all of them but their representatives are and the representatives will feed up to them and the Deans run the school boards where within their own school there are student reps and they all hear the student voice and they'll always be an agenda item which is about the student voice as well as students contributing to any other agenda item they want to.'*

All respondents indicate how influential student representation is within the governance structure. The Academic Leader describes it as follows: *'I would say that's definitely true of the Chief Executive of Students who is perceived as a peer amongst the Senior Management Team as somebody they're working with. I think the student reps on the Committees I think ... I'm not sure we'd necessarily say peers but they are certainly very valued and they're given a lot of attention, so for instance the Vice Chancellor for instance who on Academic Council day would meet with the students ahead of the Council'*

A/SVL/9

A/SLQ/8

A/AL/7

both to listen to them on anything that's on their mind and also to talk to them about the agenda that they're about to go through on the Academic Council, you know, and that's the Vice Chancellor, so, you know, I think we do take ... we do treat the students as very important people in those roles.'

The Academic Leader also notes that the Voice of Students isn't always accepted by externals on committees *'[the Auditor] sat through my School Board and afterwards he was very critical of me because I was involving the students too much and my feeling was that, you know, when a member of staff comes to the Board and they present some paper that tells me everything's great I turn to the students and I ask them their opinion on what they're hearing and, you know, that to me is very valuable so I can work out what's actually happening in the School, but the auditor said he thought it was a bit ridiculous that, you know, the students were talking so much in a meeting and that really he might expect them to have a small involvement and I was involving them far too much, so that I thought was fascinating but I mean I do use them a lot and I think it's valuable and they appreciate it enormously.'*

A/AL/8

Whilst illustrating how under his leadership the students are taken very seriously: *'...and again, certainly in the [discipline name] School, you know, we're committed to respond within two weeks to everything that is brought up in those Committees'*, the Academic Leader also shows how staff leaders such as him can steer student involvement in governance: *'we're pretty aligned with our main group of students, I mean it doesn't always work, you know, perfectly. We can have difficult situations. I mean we had one the other day where somebody was elected as a student representative of a Committee and wasn't really very skilled to be able to take part in that Committee ...[0:26:35:8] talking to the agenda immediately went off on one about you know, international students and the problems they're facing on all kinds of fronts, you know, it was a completely inappropriate way of representing himself at that Committee but then, you know, it was annoying but then afterwards I sat down with him. We went through all his issues and he's now one of the great*

A/AL/9

A/AL/10

ambassadors of the School and he's doing all kinds of things but I mean that was a case of where we got caught out where we're used to having very capable students who can just sit on a Committee and operate because they're top Lawyers or whatever, and as we broaden into Undergraduates and we perhaps get weaker students who haven't got those skills we probably will find it harder and we will probably question the extent to which, you know, they should be there, I mean obviously on the Senior Committees we do divide the meeting into some reserved business, but it's a very small amount, so if we are ratifying results for instance, you know, that will be a 15 minute session at the end of Academic Council where the students aren't present, so it's not that they see everything, but I mean generally speaking most of the big discussions we have we would probably want a student perspective in the room.'

Separately the Academic Leader also notes the influence of chairing on the ability of student representatives to make effective contributions: *'I mean I Chair the Learning and Teaching Committee where we have four student representatives and we use them very, very heavily in the meeting. Something like Academic Council what I find is because it's being Chaired by an independent person from the sector they tend to have a slightly more traditional view that sort of students sort of sit in the corner and listen, so it varies, but it seems to me to vary very much with the Chair of the Committee and their ability to bring in the students on the issues and prepare them to talk about the issues that are being discussed.'*

A/AL/11

3. Institutional Engagement with students in Quality Assurance in the institution

The Senior Leader (Quality) lists the quality mechanisms where students are most strongly represented: *'we have student-staff liaison committees, always have had (...) We have end of module evaluation forms, they're quite detailed and they score the tutor as well as the materials and everything like that so they're quite a detailed form, (...) there are focus groups on anything that arises, (...) We have students on programme approval panels (...) We have an instrument called a 'Thematic Review' and we have one or two Thematic reviews a year, so the ones over the last couple of years have been a*

A/SLQ/9

review of law school provision and the regions review of the international student experience and the review of the induction process and the students' experience of that. And the most recent ones were the review of public information and the equity of that. (...) So in all of those, the way the Thematic Review works is that we put together a panel which as a core includes myself and [name], a senior member of the academic council, normally an independent external member, one of the great and the good from elsewhere, two external experts and then often a couple of students...on every occasion two students on the panel of the Thematic Review. [And those two students are elected representatives?] Yes. (...) In addition to that, we then interview, as part of the Thematic Review process, groups of staff and groups of students so we'll have an open...we'll invite all reps but it can also be open to any students wanting to come.' The Academic Leader (Learning & Teaching) adds that there is also use of focus groups: 'so students are consulted at various periods. We hold focus group data. I mean we hold fresh focus groups, so I was just involved in some focus groups over in the [discipline name] School around, you know, re-validation of some of those modules and what the students would think of that and also our virtual learning environment is so important and intrinsic to their experience, so we've just changed over to Moodle. So we had a lot of focus groups on, you know, were students happy with it? What would they change about it, you know, what did they want to see more of? So I ... yes, so I would say that we have engagement with students across the board really in terms of how our programmes are developing. I think I would like to see more engagement with students on all of our programmes but I would say that we're doing quite well.(...) Well some of our programmes where we're heavily regulated unfortunately students can't be involved'

A/AL/12

The Student Voice Leader (Staff) explains the module surveys in more detail: 'at the end of every module, or towards the end, you would fill in a survey of part of that module and that is normally done on a computer. It's anonymous unless you wish to give your details to be contacted and you would put in the details of your module, your module tutor. That will probably link into staff appraisals separately as well, not that the students need to know about that or, you know, it does

A/SVL/10

link back to that staff member and they can work out things from there, but every module will have students filling in a module evaluation form on top of the University site survey about everything on top of the induction survey.' The same respondent recognises that the module surveys have impact: *'I think the students won't know but it will, I think, impact on the staff member staying within the company, or being further trained, or being kicked out or anything like that. For example I do know examples, and I've heard of them here ... I don't think it's linked to salary, I think it is for keeping that student, but you hear anecdotal evidence all the time saying we all complained about 'X' student ... 'X' staff member and then later we never saw them again. (...) You know I don't know the full detail and truth in that. I think it's for the Director of Programmes, or the Faculty Manager, who then deals with it in an appraisal sense, but it definitely gets listened to, especially everyone getting less than three out of five or whatever. (...) So Faculty will know, and I think students do know that that's how they base a lot of things.'*

A/SVL/11

The Senior Leader (Learning & Teaching) describes the use of module surveys by the institution in more detail: *'we have extremely stringent student feedback mechanisms. We have end of module reviews. I'll just give an example from being a tutor on the inside on the [name of professionals] training course that I was telling you about, so we would have student feedback that would occur three times over the course of a yearly period cos those students are on, you know, a traditional September start and June finish, so in October we would get our first mid-term feedback, you know, for our first months teaching and the feedback would show us ... it wouldn't show us ... it wouldn't give us a name, so it ... for example if I'm teaching [subject] it wouldn't show me everybody else's score in my team or name. It would show out of five ... if I'd scored four it would show me the position within the team if there the people in the team (...) Am I in the middle? Am I at the top? Am I at the bottom? Very important. So it gives me a score out of five for various different questions that the students have answered about my own teaching. The students also answer questions about how the module is run and obviously that goes to the Module Leader, but for my individual performance in the class with those students that gives me*

A/SLLT/5

an idea very early on what's going wrong and what can I change. Then we get another set of feedback around about February because students would've had some assessments in January, so they're more informed at that point how well prepared were they and that's very important obviously, and then we get the last set of data round about June, which is then given a more holistic overview of their experience and we're very accountable on those professional teaching teams, you know, really we have to be scoring fours and if we're not then people want to know why and I would say that is why we have such a strong frontline delivery in the classrooms because we do have stringent student feedback mechanisms (...) Well we work in very competitive teaching teams. I'd say that we recruit the best of the best and in order to survive [laughs] here you have to keep performing so staff become very driven. I think the downside is that some of the other tasks that we'd like to see staff doing go on the backburner because they are absolutely driven to make sure that they're getting the fives in that classroom, which is good in that it plays to our unique selling point, which is teaching excellence. Downside is that there are some Faculty then who are not as developed outside of the classroom.' The same respondent also explains what might happen if teaching satisfaction is not high: 'Oh dear, no, that's well, you need to pull your socks up [laughs]. You really ... they would be offered support in order to be brought up to four but it's a corporate objective. It's set in your appraisal that you're going to achieve a certain rating in your teaching and obviously that's how we market ourselves so we can't, we just can't keep hold of people who, you know, who cannot perform to a certain level in the classroom so there's normally a mutual understanding that it's not working out and those kind of staff move on and we tend to keep ... if you put those people who've been here a very long time it's, you know, the cream of the cream, those people scoring very high. Teaching is not an easy job.'

A/SLLT/6

The Senior Leader (Quality) explains that an annual survey of students for programmes is not a matter of course; 'Yeah sometimes we've done that for programmes, it depends on the approach to collecting evidence from modules, with some programmes it's an overall programme survey; for others like in [name of discipline] school, students can do a range of

modules and then they can play with those modules to get a certain degree title and then it's interesting...' However, the Academic Leader suggests a different approach is taken, relating to stages rather than a strictly annual approach to surveys: 'We have obviously lots of surveys of students. We do one very early on in their time with the University, or when they're returning to a second or third year. That would give a snap shot of things they're happy or not happy with.'	A/SLQ/10
A further route for student involvement in quality assurance is 'the Student Staff Liaison Committee. I suppose that's a more formal Committee. That's where students in every single programme report back in a meeting ... they're representative of their programme, but that's a more formal Committee' (Senior Leader (Learning & Teaching)).	A/AL/13
This institution has a further mechanism for quality review which the Student Voice Leader Staff describes as follows: 'We write an annual student written submission. I know for QA purposes that's normally six years but [name] the Vice Chancellor, has asked for us to write an annual one. I bring it together and put it into one voice but it is all the students that come together to write it and [VC name] gives us a generous budget to have an away day so that we have two days away to be able to write it and to get all ideas from all the elective students that sit on the Board and Committees and that again is a Quality Assurance mechanism (...) [the] Student written submission goes directly to the Academic Council without involvement of any Deans or the Vice Chancellor. It's a document I submit as a Member of Council. (...) the University have no involvement at all. We are very autonomous in that. (...) We can be as critical as necessary as long as we provide clear recommendations and the reason again being when we are reviewed in six years' time, or whenever the QA is, they don't care about the issues itself or per say, it's about how an institution responds to the issues. That's how the quality of an institution is measured, so [name] the Vice Chancellor, you know, the whole University doesn't care if we have issues at the moment. It's more about let us know about it. Put it into a 7,000 word document, or whatever it ends up being, and we'll address them. [gives example in relation to library facilities] The pilot is because of the students written submission.'	A/SLLT/7
	A/SVL/12

In terms of the student written submission I think students wanted more study spaces or wanted to be able to use class films when they're not being used, or wanted more to be open. We worked with our Facility Students to be able to do that. In terms of Learning and Teaching, I think they were very happy with everything in Learning and Teaching. They may not have been happy with the navigation of the virtual learning environment and because of that we provided more e-tutorials, more workshops, more online things, more ... the personal tutors went out and taught students a bit more about it. There were issues, for example, with the induction process. Students thought a shorter induction may be better with less information in days one, two and three and more information in weeks two, three and four and we then, because of that, have had a review about induction and changed things, so I think there's normally 20 or 30 recommendations, usually quite clear within each of the sections, academic standards, quality of learning opportunities, info about learning opportunities. [So that's quite a powerful mechanism you've got there?] Absolutely and I think that's, you know, it's something where it does take a lot of time and resource to write (...) me being one person and not a department that advises etc, but it is very powerful in the sense that it is genuinely the Student Voice. Everything is triangulated. It goes to the highest Committee. It is always approved in the sense that this is not for the Dean to start disagreeing with things. It's what the students have said, and we then work together to see how can we do it (...) without bringing more obstacles in.'

The Senior Leader (Quality) also regards the student written submission as an influential mechanism for quality assurance and supports the following up on recommendations; *'we found it a very useful tool, the Vice Chancellor likes it so he has funded the students to do it every year which culminates in a two day away day where they go through all the data they want to go through and discuss things with each other and then somebody writes it all up. So yeah, we knew about that. Students may say in advance we want to talk about, I don't know, facilities, the computers don't work – actually that's not a thing for this committee, that's a thing for this, or I can sort that out separately. So if there are things then as with anything else, we try and agenda-ise them but it doesn't stop a student bringing something up or commenting at the meeting.'*

A/SLQ/11

Students are also involved in programme design and approval: *'They also sit on the New Programme Approval Panels, so where we are formally... [0:19:20:6] a programme students would be part of the Panel that scrutinises that new programme and sort of contributes to any sort of recommendations or conditions around the design of the programme, so that's something that we brought in a couple of years ago. (...) for Programme Approval we would use people who have some familiarity with that programme. You can't always get an exact fit but, you know, we might choose, you know, a Masters level to be part of a new Masters programme at the Business School for instance, but it might be a different discipline. They're not coming in really to give a discipline angle, they're coming in to sort of try to address sort of student concerns around how that new programme would operate and so on, and what we find again is that there are some students who are very, very good at that and then I suppose we would tend to use them a bit more in that capacity if they've shown an ability to operate on that sort of [pause]. (...) mean that is the sort of thing where we would absolutely involve students, so not only new programmes but, yeah, the re-accreditation of a programme would certainly involve students.'*

A/SLQ/12

There is a more direct influence on periodic programme review possible as well. The Senior Leader (Quality) states: *'Well the students views, as on other programmes, they have a critical review of the programme so that will be a written document which would then survey...we'd draw on the past annual programme monitoring reports and programmes – so there's an annual programme monitoring report that draws on external examiners' views, students' views and so on, so those documents would build to the critical view, and students would also be questioned by the course team to provide evidence and information on that critical view, perhaps within a forum or a you know... (...) They can use it...I mean it's up to them how they do it but the critical view should engage students and students' views are quite recent. So building up to critical view to make sure that the last APMR really took into account and drew on students' views of the accuracy and relevance and up-to-dateness of the programme in delivering methods and so on. (...) I mean, it's there...we haven't had*

A/SLQ/13

that many 5 yearly reviews, (...) so it's an area we're still learning. What has been very useful is having students on the panel, so although they're on the panel-side quizzing the programme team often, what actually happens is they can often answer and explain the experience of the course to the panel as well. So we had this recently with somebody – an external...we always have externals on these things and one of the externals said 'oh I don't understand how this works, do you think this works well?' and the student explained in detail this is the experience of what it feels like on the ground, when this thing happens. And he said 'yeah it works because we get this out of it', so yeah...'

The same Senior Leader (Quality) does not recognise the hesitance around student involvement in curriculum development that occurs in some other institutions: *'I don't think we're explicit. I think the critical reviews as they develop will address that. And philosophically the students should, there's no reason why the students shouldn't be involved in specifying the curriculum, except that where the curriculum is specified by the professional body, so in law for instance, the professional bodies specify the curriculum for law.'*

A/SLQ/14

The Student Voice Leader (Staff) *'Many, many students work very closely with the [Senior Leader (Quality)] and so that's another way that they would do it. I think it's through a range of mechanisms with regards to Quality Assurance. Obviously we have students on our Validation Panels and Programme Approvals, Scrutiny Panels, and therefore the students can give a voice in this ...'*

A/SVL/13

4. Institutional Engagement with students on Enhancement in the institution

In relation to enhancement activity, the respondents describe an enhancement agenda which is mostly responsive to student feedback and comparison with institutions in the sector or policy implementation. Yet student representatives are involved at all levels of engagement consideration. The Senior Leader (Quality) explains: *'from any compliance and assurance mechanism you'll get a feedback that this is just really good practice or this is what the students really like about*

A/SLQ/15

this and you can take that away and go 'oh we can make that even better' we're good already, it's not simply a matter of a baseline. So, involvement of students in committees, a lot of the stuff we now do is about enhancement, it's about competition, it's about looking elsewhere and seeing what other people are doing, it's looking at changes in policy and sectors. So for instance, I chair the Education Training Committee, which is the highest internal committee before you get to the Academic Council, and that has external people on it. And the Education Training Committee's role is to rehearse and clarify policy and stuff before it goes up to the Academic Council, so the students on that body will see us review new QA guidelines, they'll see us look at the HEPI reports and say 'ok well the national average for contact hours in this programme is this... what do we mean by contact hours, what's a good contact hour, what's a bad contact hour?' all that sort of Graham Gibb stuff...and really, well the feedback I get from staff and students who are elected onto those committees is they never realised how much energy and thought goes into debating what we do and discussion and disagreement and so on. So they would...that part of it is an enhancement and people will go away with a better understanding of what it is we're doing'

The Senior Leader (Quality) also shows how internal reviews can lead to enhancement and how students are involved in these: *'The Thematic Reviews are deliberately about enhancement, and assurance, 'is what we're doing, being done well?' 'Are we doing it in a way we said we'd do it? And if it's not, how do we fix it? If we are, how do we make it better?' So that comes out a lot and students are involved in that. Also I think it's just the day to day engagement of students in the collaborative processes within the committees, taking data from the various parts of the business and bringing it to those committees and seeing what it says. Allowing the different Deans of schools to argue about different practices that they use and why they are different, because the assumption that we've made since going to degree awarding powers is that 'should there be differences?' And that answer is 'no there shouldn't be differences, there should be one good way of doing something' and usually there'll be one best way of doing something within the university. And if there is a difference,*

A/SLQ/16

why is it different? And is it different because of local need or subject? (...) So does that mean that one person has actually come up to the other person or is there just different practices that are good for that group of students, because they have a different subject basis or needs or whatever.'

The Student Voice Leader (Staff) also relates enhancement activities to Thematic Review: *'We have our regular Thematic Reviews which are Academic Council Thematic Reviews where they will look at one particular [theme] (...) We would look at one particular theme, so for example, you know, it could be induction or it could be enhancement of student learning opportunities with careers, or it could be public info, you know, recently we had one on the international student experience looking at certain parts of it and on that, because it's an external Thematic Review, it would be the Chair of the Academic Council, two independent members who are experts in that area, so four International [0:34:45:0] who flew over from China, a Professor from a different University and we had someone from ... a different Professor from, I think, Aberdeen, the Chair of the Academic Council. [name] is on it as Director of Quality but she also knows which staff to call in (...) that this Panel speaks to and two elected student representatives who are on the Academic Council will be on the Thematic Review. I wouldn't be on it because I'm a University employee as it were and that would go out and it is a Committee that can quiz people. It can go out to, you know, it can summon the Vice Chancellor. It can summon anyone saying tell us about this. They then write a report and it goes directly to the Academic Council and then a list of recommendations that both the Academic Council and the Board will have to respond to. The Vice Chancellor, the Faculty and also the Board will have to respond to ... and I think that's another mechanism we have which is independent and it enhances students' learning opportunities.'*

A/SVL/14

The Academic Leader indicates a further route of student engagement with enhancement, this time through governance: *'we've got a variety of ways in which innovation takes place but I mean I run a Sub-committee of one of the ... on the*

<p>academic side to do with Learning and Teaching Enhancement, which has got four students on it, so that is a group across School ... a University Group that meet. There are demonstrations of good practice from one School that are then listened to by another School and the students are there and we get them to comment and be part of it, so, I mean absolutely, you know, they're a part of our Enhancement Committee as it were. If we then have working groups to look at ways in which we improve things we might well invite a student to be part of that group, so if we think that's something that would be helpful we do do that.'</p>	A/AL/14
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<p>Although enhancement can be initiated by students through the provision of feedback, by and large enhancement and innovation activity itself is undertaken by staff rather than students. The Academic Leader who chairs an innovation sub committee states 'I can't think of too many situations where we've got an entirely student run innovation.' And 'we definitely have students working on small working groups on improving [0:30:48:7] improving, I don't know, I mean we had one for instance on classroom discipline that we were very interested ... students were active on how we manage, you know, people turning up late or eating in class. Students were some of the best ... most helpful people in actually how to implement more discipline policies, so I think we do involve them where we can.' And 'I don't think we've got that many instances where the students have completely owned an [0:32:01:8] ... and then come to us with a sort of readymade solution in the academic space. I can't think of examples of that. We'd certainly be open to it if they did want to do something like that that wouldn't be a problem but I think the more typical practice is that we would have a project and we'd ask a student to be part of that. But you have to remember we haven't had ... we haven't had a very, you know, established independent student union. A lot of more traditional Universities have got where you've got people in sabbatical positions working full time and all this sort of thing, I mean we haven't had a volume of people doing that. The one person in that situation has been the Chief Executive of Students and they certainly have had significant projects</p>	<p>A/AL/15</p> <p>A/AL/16</p>
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which they have done ... which they have lead on and developed and so on but it's been one person rather than, you know, ten people'

The Senior Leader (Learning & Teaching) who is responsible for developing enhancement activities is looking to develop a more student-engaged approach to enhancement: *'just as an example we had a huge transformation of our student induction processes, so we did ... conducted a review and thought 'right, how can we make this much better?' and we adopted ... we chose to adopt Nicholas Bowskill's model of student induction, which is student-generated induction where really they're running the show, so this is a real example of where, you know, we put our students in the driving seat and in order to come to that conclusion we worked very closely ...I set up a working group ... a student induction working group that was myself, Head of Operations and our Chief Executive of Students and we had a triangular Chair-ship of that group in order to model, so we chose the model that we wanted to use. We chose how we were then going to sell that to Faculty and we chose together how we were then going to role that out to the students, so that's an example.'* This respondent explains why the students should be more involved in enhancement activity: *'you know, it's the old saying that, you know, the bride should choose their own wedding dress.'*

A/SLLT/8

A/SLLT/9

5. The perceived role of students within the institution

Student Voice Leader (Staff) states clearly how the institution regards its relationship with students: *'I think it's very much in the QA's agenda, students as partners and students being able to do that, but I think even for commercial reasons you want to make sure ... if your students are their consumers as we call them, or customers, you want them to be happy because they are our greatest advocates. They are paying us money. They expect a lot but when they go on and go into the wider world they will be the ones telling their friends, or telling their colleagues that they studied at [name of institution] and they will be the ones providing future students, so even as a business you want to make sure your customers are*

A/SVL/15

looked after. People would say it's a business what part the ... someone else might say actually it's something that we want to do because it's regulatory reasons and another one is if you're charging someone a lot of money you're going to make sure that they have [0:10:09:8] in time and we hear about the issues.' However, he also recognises there is no formal institutional stance on this: 'I don't know what the official line is, I still think partners is what students are. We are equal in that sense that we are doing things. A lot of people say you shouldn't say partners because students might know more and therefore they shouldn't be a partner and it would be the senior partner etc, but I think it just depends on who we speak to as well to see how it is. I don't think there's a University wide policy on how we view students apart from their voice is very heard and we do treat our students as professionals. They are professionals; many have been sponsored and sent by a firm and they are experts in their field but that might be more so in a certain School but I don't know. I think it depends on the people. I don't know if there is a University wide policy.' Moreover, he describes how students themselves are content with the 'customer' role: 'I think we did actually speak to our students at the time ... I think the Dean of Academic Affairs asked that question from our student rep saying what do you think about students as customers? Do you see yourself as a customer or something else? The student said yeah that's absolutely fine. That's what we do see ourselves as. Customers that have a real view and we will criticise things. I don't think we see ourselves as students but as customers. (...) Yeah, and I think it's [name of Senior Leader (Quality)] who didn't like that phrase as far as I recall and he was wanting it ... it's not that. It's not customer service. These are professionals helping you etc. The students said no that sounds fine. That's what we are.'

A/SVL/16

A/SVL/17

The Senior Leader (Quality) explains his views: 'the catchphrase here for them is customers. Which some of us, and I'm one of them, don't like. Because I think it doesn't represent the sophistication of the relationship, but certainly with people who are primarily corporate, so people who are involved in admissions, marketing and so on, it's very much that the sort of people that you have to attract and that you sell to, (...) [Would that be the case for the Board of Directors as well?] I think

so. I think...but I think...and there's been a lot of arguments about whether using 'customers' is the right thing so with people like me there's been a lot of people...it's a term that's positive and you know, we're serving the customer and I say 'no we're not, we've got a whole range of stakeholders' and one of the things about the students is that it's...to use a rather crass analogy, they're not coming in and buying something off the shelf, what they're doing is they're coming in and developing and we're providing the means for them to develop. (...) Yeah, so that's a much more sophisticated relationship than simply a customer when you think of customers as somebody buying a product and whether that product's suitable or not. It's more like joining a gym with the intention of you know, becoming proficient at a sport because you're now backing it up by doing sport-related training or because you want to lose weight or because you've got a health issue, and you want to address those and be a different, have a different outcome at the end so that you've lost weight or your cardiovascular is now better and therefore you're a fitter person or that you just look more...you've increased your confidence or whatever it is, but you're not going to get there by just handing money over, it's got to be an engagement, it's got to be hard work (...) the term customer is not, it's not a proactive engagement so I think it's more like a client where the client has to do something. But also the partner element of it is very strong so it's really much more like 'you are a partner but the university's a senior partner in providing the mechanisms by which the student can achieve their goals'. (...) Well the responsibility yeah, certainly more about partnership, it's more about students taking responsibility for their own learning and for engaging in a way that enables them to hit the outcomes that they want to hit. (...) so the students are partners because they're the ones paying the money, getting the benefit, so it's a personal benefit, a private benefit in terms of the current debate on fees for example, but particularly here, when they leave here people will take them on, trusting that they know the law that they need to know and have the skills to do that and can go into practice and on from practice so we're certifying in some ways a number of things – one that they have the normal qualifications – academic qualifications they need and the skills, but also that they're a fit and proper person to go into practice, that they have the abilities to be a professional. Then they'll go on from us often straight into practice or through another stage of professional education and

A/SLQ/17

then represent people whose lives they may affect, so the people that employ them are stakeholders and the people that they represent are stakeholders, there's a matter of professional trust that these people will be appropriate (...) [how do you think the academic staff see them?] I think they see them as complete people, I think they see them in a whole number of ways. They see them as people they have got to take on a journey, and people they will be held accountable for in the future.'

The customer relationship is not straightforward in the eyes of the Academic Leader either: 'I suppose the interesting question is, you know, is it ... does it come down to us seeing them as just customers and consumers and perhaps not seeing them as students and having a suitable distance from them, that's what I suppose the traditional sector would say. I don't think we do see that as a problem. I think we just see students as very important stakeholders in the University and why wouldn't we want their view at the table? I think in terms of education I don't think that's different. I don't think we have a view that we know best and, you know they simply should do as we say. There are difficulties. I mean I've got a difficulty at the moment where I'm quite keen to put lectures online and use classroom time more actively. That's in line with what most sort of educationalists are talking about. A lot of Undergraduates don't like that and they, you know, they say they don't want that. They say they want it to stay the same and it's the extent to which you listen to that and do what they want or the extent to which you say well actually I'm, you, we're right about this and the University wants to have its education to be active and we want the passive stuff to be online and recorded and in that case, you know, we have gone ahead with what we think is the best educational decision, even though perhaps the students are not universally supportive.'

A/AL/17

The Academic Leader also clarifies that 'When I used the word consumer I wasn't saying that I said that for the sector would see [0:35:23:0] they would use, but I don't think we walk around [institution name] talking about consumers. I think

that's a mistake. We talk about them as students. That's the language we would use with [institution name]. In terms of the learning and teaching, I mean as I say it comes up in the various forums that we have where students are represented and we get their opinion and thoughts but we're also very mindful that we have our own institutional approach to learning and teaching and what is always difficult is the students are asking for things that are not really in line with our mission, you know, that's difficult for us, so if somebody, for instance, comes in and says well what I really want is a big campus based University with a nice swimming pool and a gym etc, etc, that's quite a difficult one for us because we're not set up to do that.'

A/AL/18

He sees another role for students: 'I think that I'm using the word stakeholder there to recognise the fact that they have an enormous stake in what we do and the decisions that we make around education and therefore it is very important that they are involved and their perspective is sought and so on. I think ... I know when we were on our QAA Panel they use the word Partner very strongly in the literature. I don't ... in some ways they are Partners. I think that is true, but I don't think it would be true to say that it is a completely sort of equal relationship. I think, you know, we are running the University. There's no doubt about that. We are making the academic decisions and the strategic decisions and the commercial decisions, but culturally we see students as important people, whether that be just simply dealing with them around our buildings, or their view in a meeting, so I, you know, [name of institution] take students views very seriously and that's led from the top'

A/AL/19

But also 'Yeah, I mean to me they're multiple identities, you know, the consuming thing for me is, you know, they are very legitimate things where they should expect good quality of service and experience so, you know, they're complaining to me at the moment that, you know, they haven't got enough coffee machines or whatever and they're absolutely right, you know, it's ridiculous that they're in our building and there's not enough coffee machines, so I need to sort that out and that's

A/AL/20

a legitimate thing that, you know, I might raise as a consumer of a hotel or, you know, in an equivalent situation, however if the same student comes back to me and says I got 38% in my last module I demand that you make it 40% because I pay for this course they're not going to get me doing that for them.'

The Academic Leader further recognises the limitations on student influence whatever role they may be seen to have: 'So we have to balance them as students, them as consumers, them as stakeholders. They do have, you know, a role. We are in partnership but it is not a situation where a student can sit there and dictate to me the strategy of the [discipline name] School, you know, what programmes we're going to offer, you know, there are limits to what they should have decision making over, but culturally my team will jump out of their chair to help a student. That's very important.'

A/AL/21

The Senior Leader (Quality) provides background to how the student role has changes in recent years for this institution: 'in the early days, certainly when we were going for degree awarding powers, the notion of having students on committees for instance and involved in QA terms as partners, was quite novel. [until then] the students weren't engaged to the same extent. So you imagine the average (...) student in those days was a first or 2.1 from Russell Group University who had a training contract or a pupillage and the year here was about getting [professional standing]. (...) So they wanted to come out knowing they were ready for practice. They didn't want to waste time, they didn't want to engage in anything else and their views were sought through traditional methods of surveys, focus groups, that sort of thing, so they reacted to us asking them questions but the whole shift into being a partner in the educational process for us was a relatively new dimension – as it was I think for some other institutions, traditional institutions, so that whole focus on the QA of really engaging students to the extreme of some students or some programmes being able to be designed by the student learning experience, the assessments they've written, all of that and take it to that level of aspiration, was relatively new and I remember in the early days when we were discussing this in committee, there was one very senior figure at the time

A/SLQ/18

who felt it was entirely wrong and the university needed to dictate how the student learning experience would go and committee meetings should be sacrosanct and they shouldn't be diluted by what she saw as the politeness that would surround having a student there. So the whole notion of us being able to discuss our views as an academic team or a senior management team on how the institution is run, how programmes are designed, she felt it would be undermined by the students being there, so that was one extreme at the time. (...) And this was a very genuine academic, very passionate about education and she spoke very frankly and was known for doing so. And she felt that that frankness might be lost if the students were part of the debating mechanism. However, the majority of people felt very strongly that it was a good thing, we'd get a lot back from the students if we had...especially if we had the right students, so the debate centred on how we go...what mechanisms we employ to get students into these positions and what those positions should be. So committee meetings, at the same time we were beginning to think about a student society – we didn't have one before – the students' role on things like programme approval panels, that sort of thing...and they sort of shifted from saying 'yes in principle this is a good idea' to 'how do we do it?' 'how do we get these people on, how are they elected?' And given at that stage we were still largely a post-graduate organisation with one year programmes, by the time they're in, by the time people get to know each other, by the time the elections are done, you're almost a third of the way through the course. So it's not as though you have first years coming in who when they're in the second year may think 'well I'd like to be a rep now', so it's quite difficult. And one of the things that hit us was that the student should be an elected student but there's no student body to elect them so it was...there was no student association to elect them or do that for us so it's all very new, everything had to be newly created.'

6. Other worth noting

The Academic Leader describes a threat to the innovative manner in which he views the institution engages with students, as national policy makers try to encourage isomorphism: 'I think what we've done is better than most Universities and I

worry that as we sort of adopt the more normal practice of the sector we would lose some of our innovative advantages to some extent. It is a bit frustrating when the bodies within the sector are looking to normalise us as opposed to you know, a view that well that's interesting. That's a different way of doing it, you know, maybe that has merit, you know. That's the slight frustration for me if always the answer is to copy the sector then how are we a force of innovation in the sector? I don't think that's always a good idea. I mean obviously there are limits because as a University we have to do certain things but where does that boundary lie? That is sometimes difficult. I think some of the interactions we have with the bodies in the sector they find it very difficult to contemplate alternatives, cos there aren't any alternatives, you know, [name of institution] is still a relatively unique situation. I mean there are one or two private Universities but most of those are non-profit making entities so there aren't many precedents for different ways of doing things and sometimes I think that can be a problem.'

A/AL/22

The Student Voice Leader (Staff) is equally aware of pressures particular to alternative providers that have an influence on institutional engagement with students: 'for example we have, you know, student number controls for example. If that applied to ... if the list of that applied to private providers, or we had an extra three thousand students next year, or we doubled our numbers, it will cause issues. Do we have enough library space? Do we have enough clear space? Do we have enough classrooms? Do we have enough quality assurance mechanisms? Should the Student Association then double in size? Should they then be funded appropriately to be able to help with quality assurance in a bigger thing? Would we have a wide range of courses? Would we be oversubscribed on some courses? Would the staff be able to fill up on it? And I think that's something that definitely has to be thought about and I would ... I think that is definitely on the agenda.'

A/SVL/18

The Senior Leader (Quality) feels alternative providers and the way they engage with students has distinct advantages: *'[with funding] following the student, their market choice is going to be completely opened up and as block grants decrease and as the awarding of block grants is questioned more and more strongly, then the institute's going to have to survive on the deal they give to students and their reputation among students. So for us that's very good because we feel we do that well, we've always advised our students, we know that traditional universities' Vice Chancellors were very fearful of not being able to plan appropriately because they didn't know how many students were going to come through the doors, we've been doing that all the time (...) so all these changes for us don't represent any real change in the way they do to the public sector and the operational nature of the public sector, and in our terms the public sector has always been advantaged by these grants and the way planning and finance were organised, and of course there's an increasing...with ships carrying their own loads there's an increasing focus on employability which is what we've always been about. So it's more that we've been let into HEFCE not quite on an equal playing field but actually living like we do, other universities have now got to adapt to that so the strains of dealing with the number of tutors on a programme, how many you might need and what contracts they're on, whether you get 200 or 300 students and do you need an extra 5 or do you need to drop 2 – all those sort of questions are now very much an issue for public universities in the way they perhaps haven't been so sharply before. (...) we actually welcome more regulation because we can demonstrate our strengths and we know that we are regarded with suspicion although it's changed over the last few years, so we need the opportunity to explain ourselves more, to demonstrate our commitment to quality more, so as far as we're concerned any regulation bring it on – as long as it's equal and across the whole sector and it's justified, we're not going to be the ones that are going to worry about it too much. And with that as well is the whole changing face of how students are financed, that has advantaged us in relation to how we were before when it was purely private funding and our planning systems are now having to be adopted by universities that can't say 'we're sure we're going to get 200 students, we've got the finance for it', you know, 'we're sure we're going to get an REF block grant of X'.*

A/SLQ/19

Finally, the Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) takes a more international perspective of student engagement, informed by her own research: *'I'm very aware that we know we are a global competitor and that our mission ... corporate mission is about increasing our lion share of the international student community and I've been very involved ... I've been exposed to quite a lot of material on the Doctorate in relation to the International Student Experience from a global perspective and I think that, yes, I would say that I see that as part of my responsibility in leading the educational space and ensuring that we're actually on top of the game from a global perspective because, you know, our National Union of Students will tell you what our current students might think is a good International Student Experience here but next year the profile of our International Student Voice might well look very different. We might all of a sudden have 60% of our international community who are from Africa and actually only 40% then from the European community. That can change in an instant depending on different regulation requirements and so I think the ... looking at any long term plan based on kind of year to year ISE pieces from, you know, that are written from a domestic point of view I think is very short-sighted so I'm happy to note these reports but as I say I think we're in a much better position to be looking [to take a more global picture]'*

A/SLLT/10

Appendix 5 - Institution Profile B

Institution facts and sources

Institution B	Facts		Source
1. Does the institution receive public funding other than through the student loan book? (my definition of included institutions)	No 57 tuition loan fees granted (2012)	Interviews http://www.slc.co.uk/official-statistics/full-catalogue-of-official-statistics/student-support-for-higher-education-in-england.aspx Supplementary tables - Breakdown of payments in academic years 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 by individual Higher Education provider Designated: National Statistics Published on 28 January 2014	
2. Does the institution offer any full degree courses? 3. How many degree courses does the institution have, and at what level (postgraduate, first degree or other undergraduate) A postgraduate degree is any degree for which entry requires a first degree. A first degree generally carries the title 'Bachelors of' and sits at level 6 in the UK FHEQ and can include relevant professional qualifications. Other undergraduate includes all sub degree HE including CertHE, DipHE, HND, HNC,	Yes, on the fulltime side there are five undergraduate degrees (Banking, Business and Finance), three of which actively running, two to be recruited to for 15/16. There are no fulltime postgraduate degrees. Two certificates and one Masters are offered part time.		Interview with Vice Principal (Quality), programmes and disciplines provided as per interview and Institutional website.

<p>foundation degrees and professional qualifications (Fielden et al)</p> <p>4. Which subjects are covered?</p>		<p>Institutional page on Unistats: http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/institutions/ (2014/2015)</p>
<p>5. How many students taking part in these?</p>	<p><i>'About 1800 HE students'</i> (2014/15 estimate which includes PGT students. The institution is not willing to give more detail, nor does it publish this data)</p>	<p>Vice principal (Quality) interview. HESA does not provide data on private institutions</p>
<p>6. How long has the institutions offered (whole) degree courses?</p>	<p>Degree awarding powers were received in 2010 and since then own degrees were awarded. Before then accreditation arrangements existed with Universities and awards were offered since 1996.</p>	<p>Vice Principal (Quality) interview</p>
<p>7. Has the institution undergone QAA Educational Oversight process or Institutional Review? When? What was the outcome? Which process was used?</p>	<p>November 2014, Higher Education Review, met all expectations, one commendation for good practice, four recommendations, one of which relating to student engagement in annual monitoring and review.</p>	<p>QAA Institutional review document for this institution</p>
<p>8. Any institutional engagement with students observations from QAA reports?</p>	<p>The panel recognised the challenge of engaging part time, online, overseas and working students and the ways in which the institution seeks to address this. It was also noted that there is no students' union, whilst plans exist to establish a student association. It was recognised that the existence of module on student representation was innovative and effective. Student feedback to the</p>	<p>As above</p>

	panel on the institution's ability and practice of listening to student feedback was positive.	
<p>9. What is the most accurate description of the type of the organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - private, for-profit company, wholly UK owned; - private for-profit company, international ownership; - private, not-for profit company/charity; - campus of non-UK university or college; - private subsidiary of a public institution 	<p>Not for profit, registered charity with Royal Charter. Started out as an accreditation body, now with degree awarding powers (2010) and University College status (2013).</p>	<p>Interview with Vice Principal (Quality), QAA documentation and institutional website</p>
Classification of UK private providers by function (Porter et al):		
<p><i>Delivery of Academic content</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Offering own degrees (using UK degree awarding powers)</i> • <i>Offering own non-UK degree (with accreditation overseas)</i> • <i>Offering own award in partnership with UK institution</i> • <i>Offering an award from a UK institution</i> • <i>Offering own certificated module within (or alongside) a partner university's degree programme</i> • <i>Offering own (overseas) online awards (with no UK face to face support)</i> 	<p>Offering own degrees, has degree awarding powers.</p> <p>One online, part time postgraduate Masters is offered, as well as an online Postgraduate Certificate.</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Partnership in online course delivery</i> 		
<i>Academic support for international students in the UK</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>English Language and study skills training</i> • <i>Foundation year programmes</i> • <i>First year programme</i> • <i>Pre-Master's programmes</i> 	Does not apply	
<i>Partnerships in providing content</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Production of course materials under subcontract</i> • <i>Provision of online modules to fit within an institution's virtual learning environment</i> 	Does not apply	
<i>Other types of relationship</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Partnership with private sector in continuing professional development design and delivery for third party clients</i> • <i>Contracted tutorial support in the UK and overseas</i> • <i>Educational testing and assessment services in specialist fields</i> • <i>Granting of accreditation or quality assurance services in professional or technical fields</i> • <i>Agreed articulation into a university's degree programmes from qualifications awarded by a private provider</i> 	CPD is in place in great numbers, related to the accreditation body nature of the organisation. This has not been the focus of the interviews or document research.	

Outline of governance structure:

A Board of Governors which is largely made up of external members is the most senior committee of the institution. Underneath this, an Academic Board holds all academic oversight of the institution, including standards and quality. The Academic Board is chaired by the Principal, with academic leaders, individual academics and two student representatives on it. The student representatives are recruited from the full student body (i.e. beyond undergraduate full time programmes). This Board sits alongside the Academic Audit Committee which is responsible for audit and review.

An Academic Standards & Quality Committee, a Learning and Teaching Committee and a Joint Faculties' Management Committee report to the Academic Board. Whilst the first has one student representative and academic as well as professional staff on it, the final two have two student representatives amongst the academic and professional staff who are members. Finally a Collaborative provision Committee feeds in to the Academic Standards & Quality Committee and is largely made up of senior leadership and professional staff, with no student representation. An Operation Committee and a Management Committee also feed into the Board of Governors, but these are not referred to by the interviewees and have limited relevance to learning and teaching provision.

In 2013 a Student Experience Group has been added which although not part of the formal structure, aims to address all aspects of the student learning experience and relates to the above mentioned committees as appropriate.

Source: university webpages (academic governance structure) and interviews. This governance structure was confirmed during interviews as current and accurate.

QAA findings

The most recent review of this institution took place in 2014 in the form of a Higher Education Review (source from QAA website: Institutional Review reports). In that year institutions could choose which of two themes are relevant to their review and this institution chose 'student engagement'.

The panel reports that the expectations on engagement of students in quality mechanisms is met (B5 QAA Code of Practice chapter), and that there is a low risk of compromised quality or standards on this aspect. Yet it also notes the absence of a student representative body such as a Students' Union and the absence of staff student liaison committees or equivalent. A considerable reliance on surveys (indirect student feedback) is also noted, as is the identification by students of a need for more rigorous induction of representatives. However, students also noted that their feedback is informally sought and responded to. The panel acknowledges the challenges posed by the diverse nature of the institution's student population and comments positively on the representation module provided for those students wishing to engage with it. The involvement of student ambassadors as student recruitment events is also noted positively.

Specifically in relation to monitoring and reviews of programme, the panel notes that student involvement is limited and this leads to one of the recommendations for improvement.

Interview findings

Using the five aspects identified in the thesis that shape the way institutions seek to interact with their students in relation to their academic experience, the institution is described below on the basis of the interviews that have taken place. Other findings worth noting are also listed.

1. the arrangements supported by the institution to organise the representation of student views, opinions and interests. In the literature this is often referred to as 'the student voice', suggesting this aspect could be called the *student voice aspect*,
2. the ways of engaging the student voice in the formal and informal institutional decision making, or the '*governance aspect*',
3. any arrangements to engage students in the evaluation and consideration of the quality of the academic student experience or '*quality assurance aspect*',
4. the arrangements made to engage students in the development of the academic student experience or '*enhancement aspect*', and

5. the *perceived role of students within institutions* as shown in the way students are communicated with (and about) in the context of the listed aspects.

1. The Student Voice within the institution

The Student Voice within this institution speaks most strongly through the use of surveys and selected student representatives. Interviewees recognise that there has traditionally been a reliance on surveys *'We've gradually developed our student engagement. Years ago we just had questionnaires and we've kind of built on it so now we have student reps.'* (Senior Leader (Quality)).

B/SLQ/1

Student representation is undergoing considerable change in this relatively young institution: *'And you see the thing is, the other thing is, is we don't have student rep elections; we've tried that and that didn't work. So when we recruit for a student rep we put an advert out in a number of forums, we send out a newsletter. In the email newsletter we advertise them. We advertise on the VLE – the virtual learning environment – and in other places just saying 'right, we're recruiting for student reps, please apply'. And then when they apply we then sit down and look at them and say 'right, okay', depending on their application as to where we position them so that if you also consider we've also got quite different student cohorts. We've got part-time, full-time, undergraduate, post-graduate and so we try and have a mix on the committees. We did do elections years ago and each student would get two votes and some would be their own vote so it didn't particularly work.'* (Senior Leader (Quality)).

B/SLQ/2

The Senior Leader (Quality) illustrates a high level of flexibility in Student Voice arrangements: *'We try not to be too onerous on students so we really focus on not bombarding them with questionnaires which is the easy thing to do with distance learning students and I think we've tried to listen to them when they've got things to say. So I would say there is a*

B/SLQ/3

reasonable proportion that is informal, that students will talk to us and then will go away and try and do something. We've had ... we've also, in some of our corporate customers, they will say 'oh yes, we'd like to have a student rep'. So, for example, one bank has a student rep that sits on one of our committees and they, dependent on the engagement of the student rep because they do vary, they've been quite engaged with representing their cohort but it's a case of trying things, it doesn't work, and then thinking 'right, okay, how can we try it again?' So, for example, we used to run a full day training course for students, student reps, and we found that they didn't really turn up. They sat there and fell asleep and ... And we're pulling them out of their day job and their studies. So last year we tried to ... we revisited it and tried to make it a bit more 'okay, here's a little bit on student engagement and here's a bit of kind of like an executive education master class to go with it' and there was some success. Not total success, but I think we're quite good as an organisation at saying 'right, okay, that didn't work' or 'let's try this'. We can change because we're still quite a small organisation so we can say 'right, okay, let's sit down and work out how we're going to do this'.

This institution does not have a Students' Union/ Association or similar and this is explained by reasons of size of the institution, history (professional body nature of institution) and relative immaturity. The Senior Leader (Quality) is aware of the issues this can raise: *'It's hard for us and it's hard for our types of institutions that don't have a students' union because when it comes to quality assurance from a QAA perspective everything is geared towards student unions. So they talk about having a student representative. So for example when they have the QAA conference ... we sent a student representative along one year and it was just way off the Richter Scale of what that student rep ... as a student could understand the conference was geared towards a student union person. And it's similar to this HE review process. The expectation of student engagement in HE review is hard if you haven't got a student union and you're actually having to ask students to write a student written submission.'* This respondent also states: *'I think we have to, or will need to, do something along engaging students on the full time from a student union perspective. We have a student societies policy*

B/SLQ/4

but trying to do something there I would suggest. Now, is that student engagement? I'm not sure. That's perhaps student support. Student engagement, I think our student experience will grow as [the college grows]. Our student experience group will develop as it's only been going a couple of years and we've only just employed this new role of student engagement. So I think it is a case of embedding it throughout more rather than, you know, we started off with student reps five years ago and it's kind of gone from that.'

In the QAA HER reporting there is reference to the institution considering the establishment of a student representative body, but the interviews show no action being taken in that direction other than in relation to student societies: *'We had feedback from them that they'd really like the opportunity to set up student societies and so we've now, in the past six months, developed a policy and some frameworks around that to give them some guidance about how they might go about that. So that was one example and that was approved at [abbreviation of senior management team] and it had the support of the senior staff to make that happen.'* (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)).

The institution has three kinds of students appointed with particular engagement roles. One is a group of student representatives, appointed to represent students on a particular programme and who are introduced to their cohort through clinic type events and meetings. The Student Voice Leader (Staff) explains: *'they are representatives, so the class representatives are not sitting on these deliberative committees but they are representing their fellow students in the sense that we come together on at least a quarterly basis and any other issues are circulated amongst the membership committee of the class representative meetings and this is where we discuss every day issues, you know, where student s are concerned or have issues with and they feel they need to be addressed in a setting that involves both the student body and administration.'*

B/SLLT/1

B/SVL/1

Student representatives are also appointed for each of the deliberative committees, with appointments being made to be representative of the different types of cohort that have an interest (part/full time, distance learners, mature students etc). The Senior Leader (Quality) states: *'we've had some absolutely fabulous student reps who we've really engaged with who have really offered themselves forward to spend some time taking on this role and that's where we've really taken advantage of them and got engaged with them. And then we have other student reps that it's more 'oh yes, I think I'll do that so that I can put it on my CV' or whatever their remit is for it. So it tends to be dependent on the student reps themselves. And you see the thing is, the other thing is, is we don't have student rep elections; we've tried that and that didn't work. So when we recruit for a student rep we put an advert out in a number of forums, we send out a newsletter. In the email newsletter we advertise them. We advertise on the VLE – the virtual learning environment – and in other places just saying 'right, we're recruiting for student reps, please apply'. And then when they apply we then sit down and look at them and say 'right, okay', depending on their application as to where we position them so that if you also consider we've also got quite different student cohorts. We've got part-time, full-time, undergraduate, post-graduate and so we try and have a mix on the committees. We did do elections years ago and each student would get two votes and some would be their own vote so it didn't particularly work. [Laughter] so that's why ... because they don't know each other.(...) And we appoint them for a year and if they engage we invite them back and if they don't engaged then they're off and gone and we recruit somebody new.'*

B/SLQ/5

As a final group, student ambassadors are appointed who have a role in student recruitment but can also be relied upon for representative roles.

A Student Engagement Manager has been appointed (less than a year before interviews took place) who coordinates the efforts of student representatives and has a specific remit for feedback mechanisms (surveys and focus groups), and who

also supports mentoring schemes and employability development of students. The Senior Leader (Quality) explained:
'We've just employed somebody who is student engagement manager. He started probably about six months ago, and we tend to discuss student engagement originally at our senior management meeting – academic senior management meeting.'

B/SLQ/6

Across the interviews it is clear that there is a strong reliance on students and representatives for feedback purposes. Involvement in enhancement or development of programmes, practices and policy is limited and the conceptual understanding and ethos regarding the involvement of students appears not to be settled. Whilst some responses suggest that engagement of students in governance and quality management will continue to develop, others raise principled questions such as: *'we don't want to do is run away with ourselves in terms of student power if you like in terms of just thinking well, the way to deliver student power is just to give them the keys to the kingdom as opposed to saying 'the way to deliver real student power is to ensure that the kingdom is built in a way that delivers for the student' (Academic Leader).*

B/AL/1

Within this institution the Student Voice is also a voice that has become legitimised through national policy and this external driver is well represented in interviews: *'I think what we need to recognise is that there are expectations within the framework within quality assurance framework that require certain things to be done and you can do them at all different sort of levels. You have to indicate that you're responding to the student voice or the student engagement. We've chosen to do that fully so we are putting everything in place as would be expected of us by QAA for example.'* (Academic Leader).

B/AL/2

2. Institutional Engagement with students within Governance in the institution

Involvement in governance by students is relatively new to the institution, with a clear influence from external drivers to reach the point of development at the time of interviews. However, *'we have a student representative on every one of our*

B/AL/3

committees right up to the board of governors' (Academic Leader). The inclusion of a student at the highest level, i.e. the Board of Governors, was motivated by the institution's efforts to obtain degree awarding powers. The Senior Leader (Quality) said: 'we were strongly advised to have a student rep on our board of governors. (...) When we were applying for TDAP. (...) So, at first we resisted and then we were strongly advised and we said 'right, okay' but they have to become a trustee and they serve a three year term. So we have a completely different interview process for them where they are actually interviewed.'

B/SLQ/7

Student representatives (appointed) join each of the relevant committees 'on a yearly basis so a student representative's tenure lasts for one year and then a new student representative is elected and placed onto that committee so that every student cohort has a chance to have a representative, it's not the same one throughout, so there's an ever changing point of view or perspective on things, and of course it's all involved in bringing the entire student body's point of view in funnelling that and channelling that information through the student representative. (Student Voice Leader (staff)). 'We brief all of our students on their role at the committee and we always emphasise that they're not there just to speak up at their slot – because we do have slots for them all – just to make sure that there is always that opportunity. But we brief them to say 'you're a fully participating member across all items here, you know, 'you're not sat there waiting for the student and then have to leave at the results. You must contribute to everything' - and they do I think. We have a student representative advocacy module ... they're very competent individuals and they've put themselves forward and should be respected as being able to operate independently just like any other member'. (Academic Leader).

B/SVL/2

B/AL/4

The Chairs of committees also meet with the student members in advance to prepare the meeting. The Academic Leader also notes the influence that students have within committee meetings: 'I suppose the theoretical power to change things is greatest in the committees because that's the way that decisions are made and where an individual representing all the

B/AL/5

students can say 'I think this' and a comment that they made – although they're only one vote if you like, not that we do votes – but they can influence and they are paid attention to by the other members so the decision can be quite strong.'

In order to support student representatives in their role, there is also an induction event, which interviewees regard as still under development, noting that earlier efforts have not been entirely successful. A recent appointment has been the Student Engagement Manager who makes ample effort to ensure the representative quality of the student involvement in governance and supports preparation for committee participation: *'I'm responsible for managing the class representative meetings and I bring all of our representatives together by email where we talk about different issues that they're hearing from their fellow students. So we do create an entire agenda dedicated towards the students' concerns and the student voice and then we discuss those. And then it also allows us to be able to discuss anything that's going on, on the front end, with facilities or anything like that, and then they are able to disseminate that information to their fellow full-time students, or the students as a whole.'* (Student Voice Leader (staff)). This should not be confused with a staff-student liaison committee, which the institution does not hold.

B/SVL/3

3. Institutional Engagement with students in Quality Assurance in the institution

The students' voice is particularly invited through surveys, both at programme and unit level: *'what we do is compile the data into various board reports and nominal main scores to determine the effectiveness of particular modules, what we need to look at and things like that, and then we assess those at the student experience group meetings where we look at positive feedback, responses, response rates as a whole and determining ... where we can improve and gaining more response and responding to that feedback that we receive.'* (Student Voice Leader (Staff)). Once the deliberative committees have determined actions *'we try to utilise the student representatives as a channel for that feedback because we will discuss the results from those module and programme level surveys with the various deliberative committees and*

B/SVL/4

the students then feed that back to their fellow students via the student rep forum, view word of mouth, anything along those lines. We also place summaries and commentary within our ... newsletter that goes out on a quarterly basis.'
(Student Voice Leader (Staff)).

B/SVL/5

Feedback from students on teaching performance is also considered, but interviewees do not report that this is fed back to students. *'I know that if feedback is coming back on a regular basis regarding the effectiveness of a lecturer that is something that is dealt with in a timely manner. As far as what their contract stipulates or anything like that I wouldn't be able to speak to that but I know that it is something that the administration takes quite seriously, and so the module surveys and programme level surveys do play a big role in that and obviously if it were to come down to where the credibility or effectiveness of a faculty member were coming into question that would be something that would be addressed with both students first, I assume on more of an interview basis and on qualitative basis, and then addressed with the faculty and in particular the faculty member.'* (Student Voice Leader (Staff)).

B/SVL/6

The Academic Leader describes how student input is used for annual monitoring: *'We have student input to all of the programmes that we've developed so you could say that we have a big student input for the annual monitoring reports. [surveys and student focus groups] So again they're feeding into the reports. We use that student feedback and everything. We do summary reports of our annual monitoring reviews and feed those back to the students and we use the feedback. So their input is part of it. And then of course, as I say, they are on the committee so they get involved with that.'*

B/AL/6

The Academic Leader also refers to periodic programme review: *'Any validations that take place there's always students that are asked to join and comment on the relevance of the programme and what's been planned. So yeah, students are involved in programme development and review'*.

B/AL/7

From interviews it is clear that students' involvement in periodic review of programmes has not been procedurally embedded. The Senior Leader (Quality) said: *'we try to have a student rep on our programme validations and reviews as well, and we've been doing that for probably about the last four years. [On the quality assurance side you hear discussion about whether you can have students involved in that sort of thing before they've got the degree.] the reviews didn't ask too much about student representatives on programme validation and review, but bear in mind these are ... mostly reviews so far have been part-time students who are already in the workplace, so they have an understanding. (...)Because we do get students involved via focus groups and we get employers involved via focus groups as well, when we develop programmes. So there's quite a lot of work that goes into the development and structure of a programme before it gets to validation. (...) They weave [the student feedback] into the designing the programme. We have one ... we're slightly different in that because we're equivalently one department we have one person who kind of manages the programme development. So you haven't got lots of different people. And she will have different teams depending on whether it's an accounting degree or economics degree or a banking degree. But she'll weave in the student focus groups as to what they say into the SED that's put forward.'*

B/SLQ/8

As set out previously, the institution does not have staff student liaison committees in the same way that other institutions do, but notes that once student numbers grow, such discipline level committees may be considered. The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) said: *'So for example we tried a few years ago staff student liaison committees because that's what the sector said so we thought we should. However, bearing in mind that the vast majority of our students are at a*

B/SLLT/2

distance, studying, distance learning and in full-time employment it didn't work. Currently the annual programme meeting (see earlier), the surveys, the meetings of student representatives and informal contact are felt to be effective by staff and students (evidenced by interviewees and QAA report). The agenda for annual programme meetings are set by programme managers giving a further illustration of the consultative nature of engagement with students in this institution.

Students were also extensively surveyed in preparation for QAA's Higher Education Review, which generated a high level of student responses, including from generally 'hard to reach' groups such as distance learners, mature students and international students. *'I would say the loyalty is to the organisation. And I think there's some aspect, particularly with the overseas and the professional body and doing an English degree through a professional body, so I think it's loyalty to the organisation.'* (Senior Leader (Quality)).

B/SLQ/9

'... we have a key information set and a wider information set although that is not fully populated because obviously we don't partake in the NSS yet. Because obviously we get the feedback from students anyway through our in-house programmes questionnaires which are very similar (...) But we can't put that on uni stats. So if you look at us on uni stats then we're quite ... the information set is not fully populated, so that will help prospective students get more information about us. (...) we are hoping that next year we'll have enough student numbers to go through the NSS because obviously it's only third year cohorts. So we haven't had the numbers yet. Our programme survey that we do every year we have tried to emulate the questions from the NSS as much as possible.' (Senior Leader (Quality)).

B/SLQ/10

The institution develops programmes by instituting a programme team, which consults with students during the process of design of curriculum, but does not have students in the membership. *'... we have a programme team that's there to develop the new programme and that's made up of staff from my first academic staff too and also external experts, either*

B/SLLT/3

from other higher education institutions or from industry or both. And once that programme has been pretty much shaped what we try to do is run that past a group of students, ideally ones who are studying one of our other programmes or perhaps ... that's usually the best way we work it because it's easier to get access to them, just to get their sense of what they would feel about this programme. So would it meet their needs, do they think the content's right, just a general kind of look see I guess.' says the Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching).

In relation to curriculum development, there are some reservations in this institution regarding student involvement. The Student Voice Leader (Staff) said: *'Now, when it comes to development of curriculum and things of that nature I think it should be left to academics with the constant involvement of students in the sense of running those module level surveys and programme level surveys such as feedback to the developers of curriculum and using that student voice in the process of development.'*

B/SVL/7

4. Institutional Engagement with students on Enhancement in the institution

In relation to enhancement this institution invites ideas and suggestions for enhancement from students through survey, focus groups and other feedback mechanisms, including an open feedback event, and consults on the resulting enhancement proposals. The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) sets out why the institution engages in enhancement activity: *'It's just an ethos of wanting to provide the best possible service to the students and therefore by allowing them a voice you can enhance what you do.'*

B/SLLT/4

The Student Voice Leader (Staff)) says: *'I think that is where the feedback that we receive from modules and questionnaires and programme level questionnaires definitely tells us a lot about the enhancement of the academic*

B/SVL/8

experience. Also just utilising the student reps as another means. It really does come down to those areas as being the primary focus for feedback and enhancement.'

Enhancement activities are also supported through the Student Experience Group: *'I think it would be more so with the student experience group that we have, because of the fact that it is so focused on enhancement within those areas and, yes, that's where students within that student experience group we determine who would be the most appropriate fit for handling a particular project and then after our meeting we will then branch off and each individual who was assigned to a particular project or task would then focus on that for the next student experience group meeting where we would then present our findings and how we are going to move forward.'* (Student Voice Leader (Staff)). The Senior Leader (Quality) pointed out where this new group fits in: *'We try to engage them – well, a newish initiative has been the student experience group. The student engagement also is through our committees so on our learning and teaching committee we have a standard student enhancement agenda item. Obviously enhancement is not just about improvement it's about strategic provider level. So we ... it's a hard one and we had quite a lot of debate with the HE reviewers over this. We have an academic audit committee of which we have a student rep on. We have a sustainability committee which we have a student rep on and we have students engaged with sustainability, so sustainability is one of our enhancement themes and it's not just sustainability of how we live but financial sustainable financial services perspective as well.'*

The enhancement activity or process itself is mostly undertaken by staff rather than students. A typical example is *'some of our full-time students had given some feedback that they weren't so confident in presentation making and so those two items kind of came together in that one of the full time lecturing teams set up a presence and presentation workshop series* (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)). Some of the interviewees strongly view the enhancement work as staff rather than student activity: *'I would have thought that, I mean, getting somebody to draft an assessment policy is just a slightly*

B/SVL/9

B/SLQ/11

B/SLLT/5

<p>more formal way of saying 'we really want to hear what's important to you, what you think is good, what you think is bad'. It's almost like encapsulated in a final product as opposed to 'give us your thought process on the way to it'. So I would be more interested in the thought process on the way to delivering a policy and then presenting that policy for consideration by students and other members of the faculty. And if I was a student and somebody said to me 'can you write the assessment policy please?' I wouldn't be impressed. (Academic Leader).</p>	B/AL/8
<p>However, on non-academic aspects, the institution invites students to take more of a lead: '<i>...student engagement week...Ideally it's designed for the student to develop not only opportunities for us to be able to get a feedback and collect information on their student experience but also for them to have some fun as students. We've recently unveiled a student societies policy so students can start organising clubs, and so that's going to be featured at student engagement week. We're going to have representatives from the various societies who have now been recognised by the institution and they're going to be able to promote themselves as a society and start to speak to their fellow students about joining their organisations another day, so the idea behind student engagement week is there is a different theme for each day focused on student engagement so we're going to have an employability focus where we're going to be running some internship, prep and CV writing seminars and various things along those lines and so really the week is just focused on academic professional and personal development for the students.</i> (Student Voice Leader (staff)).</p>	B/SVL/10
<p>There are some counter examples where staff and students were said to be working together on development activity. One related to the Student Charter: '<i>when we wrote the student charter which you could say is a policy document in a way, then yes that was written with them. It was written with – well, I introduced the concept - and I very much wanted it to be wielded and yielded so these are our obligations and rights, these are your obligations and rights and so we try to enact them as closely as we could but it was a definite partnership document, so it's not a student charter, it's just sort of buddy</i></p>	B/AL/9

charter if you like. And that was written very much as a joint effort. So we wrote that together from the word go. (Academic Leader). This is an area of development which according to national guidance (NUS and QAA) the intention is that joint development takes place.

The recently appointed Student Engagement Manager has started to introduce a different approach: *'students within that student experience group we determine who would be the most appropriate fit for handling a particular project and then after our meeting we will then branch off and each individual who was assigned to a particular project or task would then focus on that for the next student experience group meeting where we would then present our findings and how we are going to move forward. [And the people who would take a lead on that sort of enhancement strand would they be staff or students or both or ...?] A combination of the two, yeah.'* (Student Voice Leader (staff))

B/SVL/11

5. The perceived role of students within the institution

Those interviewed reported a mixture of perceptions of the role of students within the institution. Distinct differences were made between those students studying at postgraduate (CPD) level, and the full time undergraduate students. With regards to the latter (i.e. those of interest to this research), both notions of partnership and stakeholder roles were recorded. The partnership role is described as relating to the development of the wider student experience: *'I mean partnerships for things like recreational and student services – not services in terms of academic support but in terms of just social stuff – I think we're absolute partners, we're working at it together to make things work. They mustn't just assume that we're going to shell cash out for anything they say but we will support them and we have money to do certain things and that's all in place. So yeah, we're absolute partners. In terms of –perhaps to get us back to the point I was making earlier about the academic quality assurance fabric – I would not expect them to be partners but they are absolute stakeholders because they are effective parties. They've got an absolute right to know that our quality control measures,*

B/AL/10

even down to moderation and how we deal with extenuating circumstances and special considerations, are A1 and fully relevant and appropriate. But I wouldn't say that they were partners in developing that, I'd say that they were complete stakeholders because it's their job to say 'right, how are you doing this?' or 'this is what we feel we need' and 'how are you doing it?' and 'we approve' or 'we disapprove' or whatever.' (Academic Leader). This view is reflected in the responses of other interviewees, such as the Senior Leader (learning and Teaching): 'I wouldn't say we're ... we're not at the consumer end; that implies more an obligation to fulfil a contract rather than an absolute willingness to improve through communication. So I think we more would see students as partners but recognising that that's not without challenge to get them to engaged almost.' This respondent says about staff in the institution: 'No, they're certainly in partnership, doing the best we can for them, absolutely.' The Student Voice Leader (Staff) said: 'I mean I'm a huge proponent and advocate for the partnership amongst an institution and the student body to the extent that they are involved in the – like I said before – development of the overall learning and teaching process and student experience. (...) Yeah, but I mean overall I feel that the learning partnership amongst the students and the institution is extremely important. (...) Well, I think in the day and age that we are in now with students being responsible for covering the cost of tuition I think that does create more of a – and I hate to use the term of consumerism or consumeristic environment – so I mean (...) [the market] I think that it does call for the involvement of those students as a party. That's important.(...) I feel that our students benefit in the sense that we are somewhat smaller and so they do receive a great deal of individualised attention in that sense and so they really build positive relationships with their faculty and so I think the faculty really appreciates and respects our students and their opinions, so I haven't seen any push back from the academic side, though like I did mention earlier I do feel that when you're developing an academic curriculum it should be left to the experts with input from students upon completion of a module or something like that.' The Senior Leader (Quality) however, stresses the long term relationship between students and the institution which is also a professional body: 'My personal opinion is that they're stakeholders rather than partners, because it's through – and this probably stems from our professional body roots – through their success that is our

B/SLLT/6

B/SLLT/7

B/SVL/12

B/SLQ/12

purpose.(...) for example, we don't do research so the purpose of us as an organisation, our charitable remit is to provide financial education to the public at large, something like that. So it's our duty for students to be successful based on what they've learnt with us. (...) And that puts them in a stakeholder position. And we also have this progression as well because we offer GCSE and A-level equivalent qualification. (...) So many of our full-time students have done those qualifications with us and have then gone on and thought 'oh yes, I want to learn more, I want a career in financial services'. And so we try and provide a progression route for students. (...) and what they want is they – putting it very bluntly – they consume the education that we provide (...) I think they're a stakeholder, but that would be my personal view. The view of the organisation I would suggest is that they're stakeholders rather than consumers. (...) I've always treated them as stakeholders. A stakeholder is somebody who's engaged with us. As consumer is somebody who goes into a shop, buys something and walks out again. And you see we have quite a strong alumni as well of students who then – and this goes back to our professional body roots which I don't think we should lose sight of – but they come back and they'll stay a member with us, a member of our professional body.'

Structurally both the interviewees and QAA evaluation illustrate how this institution has taken an approach to engagement with students whereby the students play an important role in evaluating the student experience (including the academic experience) often through indirect means (surveys or informal feedback) rather than direct means (SSLCs, representative involvement in enhancement). Largely the engagement with students could be described as consultative, but not fully involved in a full partnership role. This is consistent across all respondents, with one (Academic Leader) describing this as follows: *'for me it's the question of trying to work out where the balance is between the student being the person who feeds in the information about a situation and then responds to it or is actually responsible for doing it, because increasingly for example we're seeing students going on quality assurance visits and have students sitting on every committee. So students have been part of the management fabric. I think that there's a bit of thinking that's needed as to whether*

B/AL/11

students should actually be part of the management fabric or should actually be much more focused on providing information and input and response to the actions of the management because you sort of say is it their job to work out how to take care of something or is it their job to explain that something is not as it should be and comment on the actions that have been taken in order to get it sorted. For example, if you say the university is the doctor, the student is the patient, is it the patient's job to work out a medical care programme or is it the student's job to say 'let me explain to you exactly what my problem is and where I'm hurting and how I'm feeling' and then the doctor to sort something out and the student to say 'this has worked for me, this hasn't worked for me, I am still suffering from something else or you've done that and now I'm hurting somewhere different instead'. It certainly isn't the case that doctors should just say 'do that'.

The driver for engaging students relates strongly to meeting student expectations: *'It's just an ethos of wanting to provide the best possible service to the students and therefore by allowing them a voice you can enhance what you do.'* (Senior Leader (Quality)). There is also a recognition that the institution is nothing like a traditional university: *'... there is no attitude and never has been within our organisation that we are the wondrous purveyor of knowledge and if you're lucky enough we might just allow you to come along and benefit from what we do here. That's never been our case; we've always been of the attitude that we need to deliver to the student what it is they need and what it is they want. So that's always been the culture within the organisation.'* (Academic Leader). Instead the interviewees consider the professional body-nature of the institution to influence the manner in which engagement with students takes place, i.e. with a strong emphasis on workplace preparation and continued engagement with students even after graduation: *'So the concept of having people say what they want and how things can be improved is one that we know a lot of all the time because we're always answering to our members in the professional side and that's translated effectively across to higher education.'* (Academic Leader).

B/SLQ/13

B/AL/12

B/AL/13

6. Other findings worth noting

This alternative providers recognises the challenges that their internal governance and organisational structures can cause and note the lack of understanding of providers' diversity in national policy: *'... it's hard for our types of institutions that don't have a students' union because when it comes to quality assurance from a QAA perspective everything is geared towards student unions. So they talk about having a student representative. So for example when they have the QAA conference ... we sent a student representative along one year and it was just way off the Richter Scale of what that student rep ... as a student could understand the conference was geared towards a student union person. And it's similar to this HE review process. The expectation of student engagement in HE review is hard if you haven't got a student union and you're actually having to ask students to write a student written submission.'* (Senior Leader (Quality))

B/SLQ/4
(repeated
comment)

The Academic Leader shares this view: *'But the reason I mention that is that I was having a discussion with, I think it was with the higher education academy who were talking in an open forum at a HEFCE meeting about the student charter and it kind of said – I can't remember the detail of it – but they were saying that basically private providers were not obliged to do one and therefore didn't other or something like that, and I'm saying 'well, hold on, that's wrong because the way that it is all phrased makes it seem like no-one has bothered to do one but we've done a lot that we haven't had to do. We joined the OIA before that was necessary. We met Office of Fair Access to put forward a widening participation (0:31:38.0) that we didn't have to have because we wanted one. We built a student charter even though we didn't need it. So there's been lots of student themed activity that we've chosen to do around membership.'*

B/AL/14

The Student Voice Leader (Staff) also recognises this: *'I know that for an institution of our size it's been difficult to involve ourselves in initiatives such as the national student survey, the NSS. We are quite keen to involve ourselves in that but unfortunately our student cohorts just are rather small at this time and so with the numbers of the threshold requirements*

B/SVL/13

being lowered and things like that I think that will open up the opportunity for more students to get involved in feedback initiatives like that and typically that's what students are looking at is what universities are doing to listen to their feedback, listen to their voice and implement the changes that they feel need to be changed on a basis where obviously the requests are reasonable and things like that. But yeah, that's kind of where I see it going.'

Appendix 6 - Institution Profile C

Institution facts and sources

Institution C	Facts	Source
1. Does the institution receive public funding other than through the student loan book? (my definition of included institutions)	No no tuition fee loans to this institution's students in 2012/13, but Head of institution reported these do exist for 2013/14	Interview (Senior Leadership) http://www.slc.co.uk/official-statistics/full-catalogue-of-official-statistics/student-support-for-higher-education-in-england.aspx Supplementary tables - Breakdown of payments in academic years 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 by individual Higher Education provider Designated: National Statistics Published on 28 January 2014
2. Does the institution offer any full degree courses? 3. How many degree courses does the institution have, and at what level (postgraduate, first degree or other undergraduate) A postgraduate degree is any degree for which entry requires a first degree. A first degree generally carries the title 'Bachelors of' and sits at level 6 in the UK FHEQ and can include relevant professional qualifications. Other undergraduate includes all sub degree HE including CertHE, DipHE, HND, HNC,	Yes Seven degrees, with variations. Further Bachelors and Integrated Masters are offered for 2014/15 intake. Subjects relate to Law, Accounting, Business and Creative (visual) Arts.	Interview with Senior Leader (Quality) This institution has no institutional page on Unistats: http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/institutions/

<p>foundation degrees and professional qualifications (Fielden et al)</p> <p>4. Which subjects are covered?</p>		
<p>5. How many students taking part in these?</p>		
<p>6. How long has the institutions offered (whole) degree courses?</p>	<p>Since September 2012</p> <p>Programmes are accredited through other HEIs and a commercial awarding partner</p>	<p>Interview with Senior Leader (L&T)</p> <p>Interview with Senior Leader (Quality)</p>
<p>7. Has the institution undergone QAA Educational Oversight process or Institutional Review? When? What was the outcome? Which process was used?</p>	<p>Higher Education Review Plus 2014</p> <p>Institution meets all expectations with identified good practice in programme development. Three recommendations (see below)</p>	<p>QAA website (report)</p>
<p>8. Any institutional engagement with students observations from QAA reports?</p>	<p>Recommendations include identified need to established structured staff student dialogue.</p>	<p>QAA website (report)</p>
<p>9. What is the most accurate description of the type of the organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - private, for-profit company, wholly UK owned; - private for-profit company, international ownership; - private, not-for profit company/charity; - campus of non-UK university or college; 	<p>Private, not for profit, owned by a for profit company</p>	<p>Interview with Senior Leader (L&T)</p>

- private subsidiary of a public institution		
Classification of UK private providers by function (Porter et al):		
<i>Delivery of Academic content</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering own degrees (using UK degree awarding powers) • Offering own non-UK degree (with accreditation overseas) • Offering own award in partnership with UK institution • Offering an award from a UK institution • Offering own certificated module within (or alongside) a partner university's degree programme • Offering own (overseas) online awards (with no UK face to face support) • Partnership in online course delivery 	Offering of own award in partnership with UK institutions	Interview with Senior Leader (Quality) and QAA Higher Education Review Plus report (QAA website)
<i>Academic support for international students in the UK</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Language and study skills training • Foundation year programmes • First year programme • Pre-Master's programmes 	n.a.	
<i>Partnerships in providing content</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of course materials under subcontract • Provision of online modules to fit within an institution's virtual learning environment 	Not clear, there may be some production of course materials under sub contract for the owning company but this does not affect the	

	provision covered in the research and did not feature in interviews	
<p><i>Other types of relationship</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Partnership with private sector in continuing professional development design and delivery for third party clients</i> • <i>Contracted tutorial support in the UK and overseas</i> • <i>Educational testing and assessment services in specialist fields</i> • <i>Granting of accreditation or quality assurance services in professional or technical fields</i> • <i>Agreed articulation into a university's degree programmes from qualifications awarded by a private provider</i> 	Parent company is involved in some of these activities but the institution is currently not.	

Outline of governance structure:

The highest board within the institution is the Academic Board which consists of internal (academic and managerial) staff as well as external staff and includes two students. The latter meets regularly either as a reserved meeting (with no students present) or as an unreserved meeting (with student representation) at different times of the year. This board engages with academic direction setting and overseeing the development, quality and academic standards of the College. Resourcing and HR matters are addressed elsewhere, in some cases by the owning company.

Three committees report to the Academic Board. Firstly the Review and Enhancement Board which was most often referred to in the interviews. This committee has two student representatives in its membership. There is also a Progression and Retention Committee which deals with relevant student data and the Academic Planning Committee. Whilst the latter has no students on it, the former does have student membership.

Each of the two Schools has a School Board which also reports to the Academic Board. School Boards have student representation on them and whilst the College is still small, the institution accepts these to function also as a Staff Student Liaison Committee equivalent.

Source: This governance structure was described during interviews and triangulated with the QAA Higher Education Review Plus report.

QAA findings

The 2014 QAA Higher Education Review Plus report sets out the findings of the panel, which concluded that QAA's student engagement related expectations on the institution are 'met' and that risks are 'low'. The mechanisms to make the student voice heard in relation to quality assurance and enhancement are described against the common criteria of the QAA framework. The institution's use of surveys at unit and programme level is noted, as is the existence of a charter. According to the panel survey outcomes are most strongly evaluated at programme level, with some improvements to be made at unit level. However, the involvement of students in the review process itself is noted as a positive.

The report also describes some of the College's other ways of engaging students and finds these help the College meet the expectations on student engagement.

One approach is the existence and influence of a student-led Student Council as a student discussion forum, which is rooted in the Students' Association (and independent student body with an emphasis on social activities, rather than a representative Students' Union). It notes the Student Council is open to all students to attend, but has no formal status in the governance structure of the institution, even though one member of staff attends part of each meeting of the forum to give and receive feedback. The report encourages the College to give this Council a more structural footing, and suggests that the Council should increase involvement of students not based at the main site of the College's operations.

The panel also notes the existence of student co-producers who work with staff on relevant enhancement projects. The co-producers are selected and appointed by the College and also provide feedback and input to the College, amongst others at monthly meetings of the co-producer students

and institutional staff. Student representatives who attend committees are mostly invited from this group of students, but can equally be members of the Student Council.

As the institution does not use independent staff student liaison committees and the co-producers and Students' Council offer separate routes for the presentation of student views, opinions and interests, the QAA reviewers recommend a more structural approach to engagement with the student voice.

In relation to programme development the College receives praise for its intensive involvement of student representative(s) at the level of programme design and subsequent review of the currency of existing programmes. The tripartite approach (staff, employers, students) is established to ensure effective alignment of teaching, learning and employer interests and the panel of reviewers commends the College for its innovative work.

In 2015, a follow up report was published by the QAA setting out how the institution has established a Staff Student Liaison Committee with student representatives. Student representatives' membership on all committees has also been confirmed. Only one small programme (eight students) does not have a representative.

Interview findings

Using the five aspects identified in the thesis that shape the way institutions seek to interact with their students in relation to their academic experience, the institution is described below on the basis of the interviews that have taken place. Other findings worth noting are also listed.

1. the arrangements supported by the institution to organise the representation of student views, opinions and interests. In the literature this is often referred to as 'the student voice', suggesting this aspect could be called the *student voice aspect*,
2. the ways of engaging the student voice in the formal and informal institutional decision making, or the '*governance aspect*',

3. any arrangements to engage students in the evaluation and consideration of the quality of the academic student experience or '*quality assurance aspect*',
4. the arrangements made to engage students in the development of the academic student experience or '*enhancement aspect*', and
5. the *perceived role of students within institutions* as shown in the way students are communicated with (and about) in the context of the listed aspects.

1. The Student Voice within the institution

The Student Voice in this recently established (2012) institution is direct in nature. The interviewed Student Voice Leader (Chair of Student Council)¹ states '*that it is specific to the College to have a lot of informal communication between the students and the staff. Some of this is structurally designed. The respondent explained that the Dean has an office right where the students are and there is a lot of direct contact because of this co-location. The interviewee himself also has some workspace which is also where the senior team is based (reference made to members of the senior team by first name) which allows for a lot of informal communication. This means issues are not dealt with separately in committees and through different routes, but communication is immediate. According to the interviewee the College wants to keep it that way as it is an intended characteristic of the institution. He foresees this may be difficult when 'scaling up' the student numbers and the programmes.*' The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) states '*We have a fairly open door system so the students are often sticking their head in to speak to [name] who is the programme leader for the business programmes, or [name], or possibly some of the other staff depending on what the issue is. And so any issues like that will be raised with the different vice principals or with me depending on what it is. So there's an informal mechanism as well.*'

C/SVL/1

C/SLLT/1

¹ The recording of this interview encountered a technical problem. The interview was then summarised from notes and memory. The reconstructed content was put to the respondent for comment and confirmation or rejection, but no response was received.

The Academic Leader also points at the use of surveys for more structured feedback: *'...we use a termly survey where we....well actually there's a couple of ways we do this, one from the tutor's perspective and one from the students. From the students we survey them online each term and their attitude to rate each module, each class, they're asked to identify areas for improvement, things that they like. So we collate that information and as our numbers grow, I guess the sample size becomes more meaningful. So we're just about to go through that process now actually, with it being the end of term, so it will be nice with I think we've got a decent number of students now for the...so we should be able to collate some useful data from that.'* Separately some of the interviewees also note that as the institution is only in the second year of its existence, and is relatively small, the data gathered can only be of limited value.

The College also supports two further means of organising the student voice, with one being the Students' Association (with an elected Chair and some elected representatives) and the other being a group of appointed co-producers. The role of the Student Council (a forum for discussion) within the Students' Association is however seen by some as a representative voice within the College but not by others.

Currently, the most structured input of students is arranged through the selection and appointment of co-producers with a developmental/ambassadorial as well as representative responsibility. The co-producer student are in this institution called 'co-creators': *'...we (...) appoint (...) a number of individuals from that incoming student cohort, the co-rss, and their role really is to represent the Student Body and to help [name] College to design the student experience. (...) We waive their tuition fees, so that's their remuneration for doing this role.'* (Academic Leader). The process of establishing the co-creators is a highly selective process which starts pre-entry as part of a scholarship scheme, whereby applicants are selected on academic ability: *'that smaller pool become co-creators, so it is a scholarship awarded on merit but those ones with full scholarships do have to do rather more in return than the others who don't actually have to do anything other than continue to work hard.'* (Senior Leader (Quality)). The suggestion is that due to selection on academic merit, there is little political

C/AL/1

C/AL/2

C/SLQ/1

<p>bias in the process. Yet there is a realisation that a student voice selected by the institution still differs from a student voice elected by students: <i>'they're not elected, what we do now have as well, separately, are student reps who are elected. So those people who represent the views of students about what's going on and what we need to improve etcetera are our elected student reps.'</i> Senior Leader (Quality).</p>	C/SLQ/2
<p>The co-creators (producers) have a particular role in the wider establishment and development of the (young) institution. The Senior Leader (Learning & Teaching) said: <i>'the concept of being a co-creator is also an element of what I'm talking about so that they help us shape what the student experience should be like but in the actual design – the design of some of the programmes – so we've just designed a [discipline] framework and we took the first students on that this September that's just gone, so what's that, September 2014, but 50% of that course is core and 50% of it there's electives and they can actually design their own electives. They can actually design half of their own course if they wanted to. Now, whether they end up doing that and to what extent they do that is something that we'll see but that's been put into the design framework and that's the way that ideally we would want our other programmes going forward to be designed. So some of these things not everyone knows about yet but we're putting them in place and as we grow and develop the students will actually help shape it. If we could have students teaching other students to me that would be ideal. If you had 30 students who could be teaching first year students and mentoring them and stuff; I don't know how far we'll be able to go but we'll see how far we can take it. (...)</i></p>	C/SLLT/2
<p>The Student Voice Leader (student) reports that <i>'there is no interest in the Association to combine the association and academic representation functions. Instead, the Association is seen as the students' own (entrepreneurial) way to ensure an all-round student experience with an emphasis on social, sporting and cultural activities.'</i> The Academic Leader agrees with this view: <i>'... we have a (...) Student Association, which we, as in [the] College, fund but do not get involved in the</i></p>	C/SVL/2
	C/AL/3

running of at all, that's left to the students. So they have appointed a Chairman and committee members. They feedback to us on a...well it tends to be once a term they feedback to us on their progress and any new initiatives that they're looking at. So they tend to focus I guess more on the extra-curricular side of [name] College, so societies and social events. So yeah, I guess from an academic point of view, [0:22:29, over speaking] is more about the Student Bodies as whole, not so much about the academic issues.'

Notably, that is not what the QAA review report states and the Senior Leader (Quality) says 'Student Association is elected it is also a separate ... it doesn't fall under our regulations, it's autonomous and so while it's great to have their views we can't say 'you need to come to these meetings and we need you to do XYZ'. But what we decided we ought to have is elected student reps for each teaching group and actually when the QA visited we discussed that and told them that that's what we were considering and they said they agreed, and they then made it a recommendation, while acknowledging that we'd already discussed with them that that's what we were thinking of doing.'

C/SLQ/3

2. Institutional Engagement with students within Governance in the institution

The Senior Leader (Quality) recognises that formal governance activity in this institution is limited. She says; *'Because we're tiny we have fewer committees. (...) I'm sure it's going to multiply'*.

C/SLQ/4

Whilst student representation is included in the membership of some of the College's committees, the influence of students through this route appears minimal. 'They're involved in academic board. They're involved in the review and enhancement committee and they're involved, as I said, in sort of sub-committees like degree design committees, the design concept teams which we talked about right at the beginning. So that is in a sense. We don't call that a committee but that is a (0:37:57.0). They are involved at certain meetings of the academic planning committee which is really a kind of strategic

C/SLQ/5

committee where there is quite a lot of confidential stuff discussed. So we decided rather than having meetings with reserved and unreserved business we would have some reserved meeting and some unreserved meetings.' (Senior Leader (Quality)).

'So we have student representation on the academic board, so we have two students who come along to that. Now, I can't remember how they were appointed. I can't remember if they were voted on or if they were invited on. One of them at least is a co-creator so they may have been invited on. The academic planning committee we decided not to have students on. We meet every month and a lot of the stuff that we discuss is sort of (...) operational stuff and quite often confidential stuff, because most of what we do at the moment is confidential because we're planning for things that if they come off we'll want to do a PR story on and you can't do a PR story if it's already gone public in some way, and then of course most things that you look at don't end up coming off. But we have decided we're going to have students along to two of those a year so when we're looking at the overall plan of where we're going and getting some student input into that. So that hasn't happened yet because I think we only decided two meetings that we're going to do that. The review and enhancement has students on it, and I mean really the purpose for all of them, although they do tend to be shy in the meetings, is for them to contribute their thoughts and to be taken as seriously as the staff on the various issues that we're discussing. So review and enhancement is obviously about how we're going to improve different things. So they may have many ideas and they're supposed to represent not themselves but the students. So if they know the agenda beforehand they will get some ideas from other students, it's not just their personal view.' (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching))

C/SLLT/3

3. Institutional Engagement with students in Quality Assurance in the institution

Some of the traditional forms of engagement of students in quality assurance mechanisms do not take place in this institution. There are no Staff-Student Liaison Committees as such, but there is '[the Review and Analysis Board] *that*

consists of [institution name] staff, academics and students. That Board we don't have, I guess, external people, other than the students. That's students and staff only. That also acts as a staff/student liaison committee as well, so it's heavily focused on the student body and it's, I guess the formal mechanism for students to feedback to us on issues or areas that interest them [0:20:02, over speaking] to life at [institution name]. (...) Again, interested parties, so just a range of students who again were...showed an interest in joining and they were therefore invited to join the committee last year.' (Academic Leader).

C/AL/4

Unit evaluations are done both informally by some staff, and formally as part of a larger regular programme survey, rather than separately for each individual unit: *'... it's a single survey but they will be asked about each of the units within it and they are generally doing four units in one term so they'd be asked around those four units.'* (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)). The Student Voice Leader notes that the institution takes performance action on the basis of the survey outcomes. The staff-student liaison is described as happening 'informally' and at each discipline's 'School Board' where staff and students review the programme at least twice a year. There are other routes for feedback: *'We also have an appraisal system. So because we're trying to create a sort of ... the feeling of a professional environment all the students get appraised every year and the appraisal system which is a bit like what happens at work. They have to reflect on themselves and what they've done and are doing well etcetera as well as on us. So it's a two way street and then they all meet on a one to one with the talent development officer and ... or it can be with some of the key lecturers I think. So that is them reflecting on themselves but also reflecting on what it's been like to be with us etcetera. So that's information that's collected from every student on a one to one basis. (...) [an officer] brings that back to the programme leader and then the vice principal for academic delivery. The person who's in charge of academic delivery he'll look at that overall [feedback from student appraisals] and that will feed into the review and enhancement committee at an appropriate point and also*

C/SLLT/4

C/SLLT/5

into the APMR [annual programme monitoring report] and therefore the enhancement improvement plans that you put in that kind of stuff.' (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)).

A further innovative method of quality assurance is the establishment of 'concept design teams' that develop degree programmes: *'we have degree concept teams (...) they're a panel who design the overall concept of the programme and hold a series of meetings over several months and those include, as well as internal staff members of [name] College, they also include members from industry, external academics and also at least one student. Now, our initial degree conception we obviously didn't have any students because we hadn't even started. So we had [nationally student representative name] (...). He represented the student voice on those. But then we've had students either ... if it's a new area, since then we've had students ... if it's a new area we're looking at, we've had a student who is a graduate of another university in the discipline, if we don't have any students in that discipline, and we also ... so for example we already had students studying our business and enterprise programme but then when we were looking at validating a new suite of business programmes with [named institution] to add to our suite of business programmes we had one of our own business students on that panel. And what we're intending to do going forward is even if it's a new discipline for us we think it will be useful to have, as well as a student who has some knowledge of that discipline, so not us, to have a student who is also one of our students just to talk about the student voice more, or student issues more generally. So while they may not have knowledge of the subject area they can certainly input into a lot of areas of the design of the programme.'* (Senior Leader (Quality)).

C/SLQ/6

The principles of such close student involvement –alongside employers and academic staff has elicited ideas on expanding the principle in other contexts: *'I've been thinking about things like we have students, as I said, on the design concept teams but perhaps including them on internal validation events. The ultimate validation event is held by our partners but*

C/SLQ/7

we might want – you were talking about periodic review – but before we go with a programme to a partner we have a stage of internal validation which is a kind of newer thing and I think it would be good to have students on that actually, for example, just as a ... that's a kind of mini example rather than a sort of overarching development. At the moment as they are involved quite a lot it's harder to kind of think where we go next but I guess that will be in itself a topic and a topic that we will be asking students and co-creators to think about.' (Senior Leader (Quality)).

4. Institutional Engagement with students on Enhancement in the institution

In this new institution, enhancement of the student learning experience is a joint venture of staff and students. The student co-creators play an important role in this: *'there's two strands [to their work]; one strand is in terms of informing future students of what it's like to be a student at [name] College and they do that through different ways, and the other strand which used to be like a student rep is now actually working on research projects in areas that we would like as a college to [develop and enhance]'* and *'So one project we set recently was how other higher education students tackle group assessment, and in particular how they mark that and whether it's marked ... there's different ways; by peers, by staff, whether all the group get the same mark, whether the mark is to do with the group contribution, etcetera, etcetera. So we've set a research project around that.'* (Senior Leader (Quality)).

Yet, enhancement opportunities are also supported for other students: *'We've got some students who have come up with some ideas around some apps for example and timetabling. They've come up with those ideas themselves but then they might go to one of the lecturers or to the programme leader or something to see, you know, is there someone who could help me turn this into something or whatever. But that's still quite student driven – well, that's very student driven.'* (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching))

C/SLQ/8

C/SLQ/9

C/SLLT/6

There is even an interest in involving all students in building the future University model: *'they should be contributing, not just to the college, they should be contributing to the company because they are part of the company and to the commercial professional world. So, for example, one of the things I've suggested to the HR team in the company - we don't yet have any kind of higher apprenticeship scheme in the holding company - and I've suggested ... and there's ... they have a limited amount of resource and they're focusing on some of the lower apprenticeship levels, and I've said 'what if we actually got some of our students to design a hire apprenticeship scheme?' So it would be a CV building experience for them, obviously a massive learning experience, but it would also be a genuine contribution to the company and to the people that become the hire apprentices. Now, they could work on that kind of project, not just with our holding company but also with other commercial and charitable entities'* (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)).

C/SLLT/7

In governance terms, there is an Enhancement and Review Committee that reports to the overarching Academic Board. Whilst this is referred to by the Senior Leader (Quality) as a place where enhancement is discussed, it does not appear to play an active role in planning enhancement activity (yet), which is suggested to be due to the very new and small nature of the rather institution. Instead, *'Much enhancement is driven by ongoing, informal contact with the leadership of the College, and in particular the Dean. This ensures for improvements to be made in an immediate and ad hoc manner where required.'* (Student Voice Leader (Student)).

C/SVL/3

5. The perceived role of students within the institution

The general view in this institution is that students are customers and partners. The Academic Leader stated: *'Well I guess we see students as our customers and it would make sense for your customers to be heard and listened to when defining the experience. (...) undoubtedly that customer element, but it's more than that, it's...and partner I guess is probably the closest thing to it. We do actively involve our students in decisions that are taken here and as a body I'd like to think*

C/AL/5

anyway that they feel that they had a strong input into the....into life at [institution name]. So I mean we as a [institution] deem them very much as a partner....'

The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) explains how students have a particular role in developing the institution itself: *'It's to sort of question really what a university needs to look like and what it's trying to achieve and if you really want to have a community of people which is the traditional idea of university is very much around an academic community. These days actually you have tens of thousands of students who just follow the regulations and do what they're told and sit their assessments and that kind of stuff. So we're very small and in the UK at least I imagine that we'll probably always be a sort of boutique university if you like. So there's an opportunity there for the students themselves to really shape it and when you look at pedagogy, which you would have looked at, and the different amounts that you learn, sitting and listening to lectures is one of the least effective methods and the most effective and the person who learns the most in the classroom at any one time is the teacher. So the more that we can put students into the role of actually designing and being responsible for their own learning and helping other people and all that kind of stuff, the more that they do that, the more that they'll actually learn and hopefully they'll also be really creative and will create a university that's not like everyone else and is perhaps more equipped for what the modern world might look like. So that's really the reason behind it.'*

C/SLLT/8

A distinctly different approach in this College is this 'tripartite' of staff, students and employers. Where traditionally institutions find a balance of the student voice and the staff (academic) voice, in this College there is a specific and integrated place for the employer voice. *'before we even validated the first degree we decided that we wanted everything to be designed with three points of contact. So we wanted to have an academic lead, an industry lead and a student lead in everything that we did, unless for some reason it wasn't practical. So right from the word go having the student voice within what we're doing was important. In fact, I was influenced by – [name], believe it or not – and they talked about the*

C/SLLT/9

history of universities and I don't know if you remember that they talked about there was the Paris model and the Bologna model. And I think the Bologna model was the one that was very student centred and the students decided on the teachers and the syllabus and all this kind of stuff, and I thought that was absolutely fascinating so we wanted to actually have students involved in designing what a modern university would look like, and that's what we're still hoping to do so that they're actually our ... I mean they themselves have set up their own student union and various types of clubs and societies and so on, but we want to go much further than that; we want them to help us - when we get our new facilities – we want them to help us design what the facilities should look like, what the different sorts of spaces should look like and as we go through each stage we want them to help shape what they're doing. My ideal would be that every cohort of students would contribute something to the shape of the university as it grows. So right from the word go we wanted to have the students helping design what we become.' (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)).

This drive to shape the institution through a tripartite is also present in academic leadership: *'... the student voice runs centrally through our philosophy and what we do. We specialise I guess in industry engagement, but we see it very much as a three way approach between students, academics and industry. In terms of debates and discussions about how student's views and opinions are engaged with, I think...I mean really it's been part of the strategy of [name] College from the very beginning'* (Academic Leader). The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) who heads up the College states how in this tripartite the students relate to the employers' involvement: *'so what we're saying is that they wouldn't have as good employment rates if they didn't have that [placements], and there's lots of other things that show that, which means that there's a whole lot of really important higher education learning that happens in the workplace. Now, not everyone can necessarily get an internship although we give all of our students some kind of internship provided they're passing all their papers and progressing, blah, blah, blah. But that's not necessarily possible, but what you can do – and this is where a lot of the employer engagement philosophy comes from – is if we engage employers in what we do, if we, as much as*

C/AL/6

C/SLLT/10

possible, we get chunks of the learning happening around real stuff then the students are going to learn far more and they're going to be far better equipped when they move into careers. They'll have made more of an impact, they'll be doing things that they can put on their CV but also they'll be much more interested in the subject. It moves away from something just theoretical in the classroom into something where actually I'm really helping or perhaps not managing to help a whole bunch of women in India who are really poor. So to me, when I look at employers and industry, I see them as the missing professors. We've got academic professors, everybody has that, but there is a whole world that is every bit as important that is missing from the classroom and the learning experience, not just internships but actually from the learning experience. So we're deliberately trying to blur those two things together. So the academic side is really important as well. That almost goes without saying; you can't have it without that. But then you have the missing professors and then you have the students. So that's why it infiltrates everything that we do'. In the interviews there are several examples – nationally and internationally- of current students in this College taking on such employer engagement activities.

Equally, the Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) sees the interaction between students and the parent company that owns the College as of particular influence to how the role of students is perceived by the College in the future: 'So the company, because it's an education company it's very interested in the students' opinions so sometimes there's certain things – it could be a consultation document or something – that we're looking at that someone in the company might be interested in talking to some of the students, which is great for the students. But with other things, on a couple of occasions they've had an idea – there was one not that long ago which we thought was worthy to pitch into a couple of higher up people in [company name], which gives the students very good experience and then you never know something or other might end up happening and then they can also pitch to the corporate partner, because they meet corporate partners all the time, like multiple times over the term they'll be meeting other companies and finding out about them. But I don't want students – and I've not shared this with the students yet - but I don't want them to think that they just have to do

C/SLLT/11

something that is a charity to be supported by us because I'm very interested in them becoming genuine business people and it just needs to be on a business-like footing in proportion to whatever the size is of what they're doing. So if they were able to come up with some idea and we could help them get started in the two or three years they are with us they actually got a business up and running and they exited with a business then we would have whatever arrangement we had about money, if money was involved. But that would be fantastic. We wouldn't try and lay claim to the intellectual property of what they were doing.'

The role of students in this institution is described both as partners in the entrepreneurial venture of creating the institution, but also as customers: *'Well I guess we see students as our customers and it would make sense for your customers to be heard and listened to when defining the experience. (...) the students are amazing, you know, the initiatives they drive and the things they're doing. I guess all we can really do is give them the flexibility and the support and resources to do them. I really think they've bought into this idea that we are essentially, ourselves, a start-up and we are a very big (...) umbrella, but we are a start-up and we are creating something from scratch and the students that come here, they understand that that's the situation, they understand that we're young and we're developing. I think they're quite attracted by the opportunity to have a say in the development of [the College] (...) there's definitely an entrepreneurial flair to our students. (Senior Leader (Quality)). This is also described by the Academic Leader who as interviewed: 'We very much view students as our customers and we want our students to be satisfied with the tuition that's provided to them (...) undoubtedly that customer element, but it's more than that, it's...and partner I guess is probably the closest thing to it. We do actively involve our students in decision that are taken here and as a body I'd like to think anyway that they feel that they had a strong input into the....into life at [name] College. So I mean we as a college deem them very much as a partner, just as we view industry, it's a three way relationship. So I'd like to think, and it's an interesting question that*

C/SLQ/10

C/AL/7

maybe we should ask our students, but I've never articulated it in that way before, but how they think we view them or rather how they see themselves in relation to us.'

Perhaps the experience of the Student Voice Leader (Staff) combines the different angles best. He '*described² at an early stage of the interview how students are seen as customers or clients. In response to this question the interviewee referred to the nature of national and policy discussion and the preference for students as partners in the public sector. His view was that this is not appropriate for the type of institution [name] College is, as they are deliberate in their approach towards students as those who enjoy and benefit from the education and student experience they offer.*

C/SVL/4

The interviewee did not see students in the role of co-creator or in entrepreneurial roles (such as in the Students' Association) as partners to the institution. Instead students were recognised as entrepreneurs within the business-building environment of [name], which was referenced to both the wider [company] and the College itself. Reference was also made to where the College was physically based: on [central London business district], at the heart of where many businesses have their head office (including in the building itself). He felt this to be unique to this College and reflected in the role that students have within the College.'

6. Other worth noting

The College is a private not for profit institution owned by a larger FTSE 100 listed company which is UK owned and in parts has an interest in educational accreditation and publications. The owning company is branching out into academic

² The recording of this interview encountered a technical problem. The interview was then summarised from notes and memory. The reconstructed content was put to the respondent for comment and confirmation or rejection, but no response was received. This interview was held and noted before any of the other interviews of this institution.

infrastructure aspect such as online learning platforms, provision of content and testing. The for profit nature of the parent company is understood within the College: *'there are expectations that we will reach a certain size by a certain date and that that therefore comes with a certain amount of revenue but remember we're set up as a 'not for profit' so the plan is that when we eventually get degree awarding powers and university title we might stay 'not for profit' as a university but then we might create some 'for profit' entities and validation services and stuff like that.'* (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)). The College also recognises a unique relationship with the company that owns it in terms of developing educational and pedagogical understanding, for which data is intended to be collected. Additionally, the College is eager to connect to the business nature of the wider company and seeks ways to have students to engage with the relevant levels and employees of the owning company. The future plans for this stretch into making Business programmes as much of an entrepreneurial experience as an academic one. This mutual interest aim to enhance the education of those engaging with either the College or the company's other provision and despite anticipated commercial company interests, is firmly educational in nature. This was borne out in interviews and documentation research.

C/SLLT/12

Appendix 7 - Institution D

Institution facts and sources

Institution D	Facts	Source
1. Does the institution receive public funding other than through the student loan book? (my definition of included institutions)	No. However, no details are available regarding the numbers of students on the loan fee book. The institution does not make this available and the annual public reporting has not yet taken place. Students are eligible for student fee loans.	Interview with Senior Leader (Quality), institutional website.
2. Does the institution offer any full degree courses? 3. How many degree courses does the institution have, and at what level (postgraduate, first degree or other undergraduate) A postgraduate degree is any degree for which entry requires a first degree. A first degree generally carries the title 'Bachelors of' and sits at level 6 in the UK FHEQ and can include relevant professional qualifications. Other undergraduate includes all sub degree HE including CertHE, DipHE, HND, HNC, foundation degrees and professional qualifications (Fielden et al) 4. Which subjects are covered?	Yes Current degrees offered are HND, BSc and MSc, with an emphasis on HNDs and top up arrangements. There are two undergraduate BSc programmes. Subjects covered are Computing, Health Care, Business and Tourism & Hospitality Management.	Interview with Senior Leader (Quality) and Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) and Institutional website.

5. How many students taking part in these?	Approximately 400 It is noteworthy that this institution had 2900 university level students in 2011, 1416 in 2012, 870 in 2013 and 336 in 2014. The loss of international student market (due to immigration related policy change) is quoted as the reason for this drop in student numbers.	Interview with Senior Leader (Quality) and Senior Leader (Learning & Teaching). HESA does not provide data on private institutions
6. How long has the institutions offered (whole) degree courses?	Since 2003 with some of the same accrediting institutions as are currently in place.	Senior Leader (Quality) interview
7. Has the institution undergone QAA Educational Oversight process or Institutional Review? When? What was the outcome? Which process was used?	Yes, in 2012 the institution underwent a Review for Educational Oversight (REO) followed by a 'commendable' outcome as a result of the monitoring visit in 2014. In 2015 its monitoring report is also approved.	QAA Institutional review document for this institution and interview with Senior Leader (Quality)
8. Any institutional engagement with students observations from QAA reports?	None of the three reports suggest the reviewers have evaluated this aspect in depth.	As above
9. What is the most accurate description of the type of the organisation: - private, for-profit company, wholly UK owned; - private for-profit company, international ownership; - private, not-for profit company/charity;	Private for profit company, UK owned, company house registered	Interview with Senior Leader (Quality, Learning and Teaching), QAA documentation and institutional website

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - campus of non-UK university or college; - private subsidiary of a public institution 		
<i>Delivery of Academic content</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering own degrees (using UK degree awarding powers) • Offering own non-UK degree (with accreditation overseas) • Offering own award in partnership with UK institution • Offering an award from a UK institution • Offering own certificated module within (or alongside) a partner university's degree programme • Offering own (overseas) online awards (with no UK face to face support) • Partnership in online course delivery 	Offers awards in partnership with UK institutions (accredited programmes)	
<i>Academic support for international students in the UK</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Language and study skills training • Foundation year programmes • First year programme • Pre-Master's programmes 	A separate arm of the College provides English Language courses preparing students for IELTS. Access to HE courses are also provided.	
<i>Partnerships in providing content</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of course materials under subcontract 	Not applicable	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Provision of online modules to fit within an institution's virtual learning environment</i> 		
<p><i>Other types of relationship</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Partnership with private sector in continuing professional development design and delivery for third party clients</i> • <i>Contracted tutorial support in the UK and overseas</i> • <i>Educational testing and assessment services in specialist fields</i> • <i>Granting of accreditation or quality assurance services in professional or technical fields</i> • <i>Agreed articulation into a university's degree programmes from qualifications awarded by a private provider</i> 	Recruits students for one other institution.	Interviews

Outline of governance structure:

The institution is private for profit, with its highest level governing body being a Board of Directors, mostly made up of the owners of the company. Within the institution the most senior body is the Academic Board, which is chaired by the Principal, and includes the Academic Registrar, course managers, elected staff and student representatives (Source: QAA REO 2012). This Board oversees all academic matters and academic direction of the College, but has delegated oversight of student progression to a Progression Board.

Course boards, chaired by individual course managers, include teaching staff and student representatives and meet at the start and end of each term, with course managers meeting with their course administrator weekly. The Course Boards report to the Academic Board.

The Student Council is a regular meeting of student representatives who meet to discuss welfare, social cultural and student experience matters. The Council is not a formal governance arrangement but through its representatives and the institutionally appointed Student Service Manager which supports all Council arrangements, the Council is strongly represented throughout all formal governance.

Source: QAA Review of Educational Oversight report (2012) pertaining to this institution, as well as interviews with the Senior Leader (Quality) and Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching).

QAA findings

There are three QAA reports published regarding this institution. Two of them are annual monitoring reports against the original Review of Education Oversight (REO). Although this review process checks practices in the institution against all codified QA expectations pertaining to HE in the UK, in this case it leads to a limited set of remarks about student engagement, and activity that is noted relates mostly to students feeding back to the institution as part of annual monitoring. Further mention is made of the student representatives' efforts to form a Student Council. Students set the Council's terms of reference, and these relate to teaching and learning, resources and welfare and includes the organisation of sporting, social and cultural events. It is also noted that students spoke with the reviewers, but no other engagement processes, procedures or outcomes were mentioned. At the point of the REO of the Institution, the QAA's Chapter on Student engagement (B5) (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b>) was not yet formally introduced, which may explain why such limited emphasis on engagement occurred.

Interview findings

Using the five aspects identified in the thesis that shape the way institutions seek to interact with their students in relation to their academic experience, the institution is described below on the basis of the interviews that have taken place. Other findings worth noting are also listed.

1. the arrangements supported by the institution to organise the representation of student views, opinions and interests. In the literature this is often referred to as 'the student voice', suggesting this aspect could be called the *student voice aspect*,
2. the ways of engaging the student voice in the formal and informal institutional decision making, or the '*governance aspect*',

3. any arrangements to engage students in the evaluation and consideration of the quality of the academic student experience or '*quality assurance aspect*',
4. the arrangements made to engage students in the development of the academic student experience or '*enhancement aspect*', and
5. the *perceived role of students within institutions* as shown in the way students are communicated with (and about) in the context of the listed aspects.

1. The Student Voice within the institution

It is recognised in this institution that the Student Voice has changed in nature recently. The Institution has over three years gone from an intake of nearly 3000 students, by and large of international (Tier 4) background, to a more home student body of over 300 students. Considering the relatively small number of students who benefit from an already matured infrastructure in support of the student learning experience, it is notable how the arrangements in support of the student voice are still very much in the early development stages. This does not take away from the commitment to students' interests though: The students recognise that there is a genuine interest in students' views and opinions: *'right from the beginning we felt that there was a lead and I think with all fairness the institution had already recognised that ... that it was paramount important to have the students engaging with the institution in order to get their suggestions, their feedback and to see how, you know, they can offer the learning how it comes better from students perspective so somebody had to be there and for reasons why it was emphasised right at the induction that you know, we would be looking to have students voice and that it should be an individual that should be elected and responsible for representing the students for any suggestions to better our services so that we make your learning experience better and all sorts of debates were held right from the beginning and there were plenty of occasions whereby we had some issues that we needed to bring to the attention of the institution and it duly heard them and actually obliged.'* (Student Voice Leader (Student)). The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) also notes this, and relates it to the informal nature of contact between students and staff: 'We

D/SVL/1

D/SLLT/1

don't have any major issues or [...] of something like the college ever, and I think it's probably because we try our best to engage our students as far as we can, not necessarily always formally, very much informal, wherever the opportunity arises, but yeah, we are, it is probably because of our size that it's easier to deal with things informally and it's quicker to deal with things informally, than it would be in a big institution.'

Whilst much of the student voice is heard informally, there are more structured approaches in place, through both student representation and survey methods. Early in the year, student representative are elected. The election process –described in several interviews- is relatively informal: *'...the first two weeks they have induction. They get to know one another and once we start the class, it's just before we start, at the end of the induction we basically ... they are aware I think in the second week they're aware that they would have to choose a student representative. So they get a time to think about and they can see who they think is the right person to represent them.'* (Academic Leader). This results in a relatively small group of representatives (currently fewer than 15) who form the College's Student Council: *'Every class, every group in the college elects a student representative. The student representative is then automatically a member of the student council. It's certainly where some of [communication with the institution] takes place. I wouldn't say huge amounts because you have to understand there's a difference between what might be seen as the informal and the formal communications.'* (Senior Leader (Quality)). The Council itself is strongly mediated though a member of staff who participates twice a term in a Council meeting: *'I'm also the link between our student council and the college management. So I'm the one who provides the student, course representative training, I am the one who meets with the student council, who listen to their feedback and then I feed that back to my colleagues on the senior management team and implement whatever needs to be implemented and then feed back to the student council on the changes or how their requests were listened to and then how we acted on that.'* (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)).

D/AL/1

D/SLQ/1

D/SLLT/2

The relatively informal manner of electing representatives –who remain in post until the end of their studies- and the reliance on a mediator between institution and the Council, raises questions about the independent voice of student representation. However, the debate in this regard is driven by the staff member who holds a non-elected mediating role: *'So at our next meeting, which will be coming up in a week or two, we would be then electing our president, and then my aim would be to work with that person to get the student council to be more independent, and instead of me inviting them to meetings, for them to be calling their own meetings and inviting me as an independent person to come and sit in their meetings and get their feedback. (...) it's, well because that is part of my responsibilities, it's driven by myself. We haven't had any meeting or anything like that where it was said we need to get our student council to be more independent, but looking at, I think looking at the way that a student union would normally operate, that's something that I would, with my hat on, would try and aim for. Now I know it's a very long journey still, to get that independence (...) So decisions can get taken on an individual basis, rather than on a group or a management basis. It's something that I would have fed back to my colleagues on the senior management team in any case, that this is my aim, and they agreed with that, so it is driven by just myself. (...) I think for us, to get a proper independent voice from our students, I think for me though, to have them work as an individual body would be ideal, probably because that's what I'm used to and that's what I've seen from other student's unions. It might just be that I am trying to get something off my shoulders, to offload some of my duties. (...) it's not a request that was ever voiced by the students, if I could put it like that. But then again, what I've found with that is if you don't nurture them in a certain direction, they're never going to make that decision themselves anyway.'* (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)).

D/SLLT/3

Alongside the informal and representation routes, students also feed in through a range of surveys. There is no reference to the use of student data or specific research activity (of focus groups) into student interests and views. The survey structure relates to both learning and teaching matters (see 3 below), but also to the wider student experience: *'(...) once*

we've accepted them onto the course and we actually come and they register to start on the programme, that's where my journey starts with them, and I ask them for feedback throughout the whole process. So once they've completed their enrolment and we've said like a thank you now enrolled, see you next week to decide your class, or something like that, they don't leave here before they've completed our feedback. And then they come for induction, we run a week or a two week induction with them and at the end of induction we do another feedback with them. [So how important are surveys to your quality monitoring?] Extremely, extremely important. Like most institutions, we border on (...) over surveying, (...) the first time they would give a feedback (...) is the day that they enrol with us, then after that, would be the end of induction, and then after that, half way through the first term our academic staff will do informal feedback with the students, and then after that, at the end of every term, and the end of every unit we do feedback with the students, and that feedback gets fed back into our lecturer end of term reports and that then goes back to the course manager's report and that goes back to the [Institutional Monitoring and Evaluation Reports]. So we do look at the feedback.' (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)).

D/SLLT/4

None of the interviewees refer to a collective, institutional view of engagement with the student voice, nor is there reference to a debate regarding the way in which the institution seeks to hear the student voice. The main steerage comes from the Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching), who whilst clearly having the lead on engagement with students, does not have a senior, strategic leadership role within the institution.

2. Institutional Engagement with students within Governance in the institution

The governance structure within this institution is relatively contained. With only few boards overseeing learning and teaching, students are represented at all Boards. However, some of the structures give less voice to student interests than usual, as the Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) explains: *'we don't have a staff student liaison committee, (...), the*

D/SLLT/5

course boards is a termly meeting between all academic staff, admin staff, academic management staff and the student representative, so it is similar to a staff, student liaison committee but on a course level. So for each of our courses that we run have got their own course board, and they sit once a month to discuss any issues, yeah, anything that needs to be addressed, it's like a catch up meeting every term to see where we're at and where we're heading and those kinds of things.' To note, staff student liaison committees in the traditional sense would have a considerable number of student attending and in most cases students will outnumber staff members. The same interviewee also states: 'so where the students aren't represented, like for instance the curriculum management group or the senior management team, and I always tell the students that I then step into their shoes. So even though it's a thing that I wouldn't necessarily agree with, I would still take the message to the senior management group or the curriculum management, on behalf of the students, and tell the conversation with the students. So, because there are some points where it's in between a course management, it's been a while since the last meeting was and it's going to be a while until they meet again with the course managers, so then I meet with them in between and that's where I then also take their concerns forward to my colleagues. I mean course boards mainly are aimed at academic affairs, course related, whereas my meetings with the student council goes further than that, not further than that, it actually doesn't, I don't address academic matters with them. I address college wide matters with them. (...) I try and make a clear distinction between that, between my meetings and the course board meetings. If there is an urgent academic matter, I would then take that forward to my colleagues and the academic team, if the student can't wait until the next meeting. But I try and encourage them to discuss other things, rather than just purely academic, because otherwise I take the place of the course board meeting, and I don't want to do that. And because I go to the course board meetings as well, I know the things that are discussed in those meetings. So it's more of an organisational level than a college wide level that I discuss things with them. I'm trying to think of something that we discussed recently, but I'm. Well many a time, the students might have a problem with members of the course board, for

D/SLLT/6

instance, so if they have an issue with the course manager, for instance, and they feel uncomfortable to discuss that in the course board meeting because the course manager is present, then they've got their [opportunity through me].'

This respondent notes that his involvement in the process is a matter of transition, and he expects that there will be more independence at a next stage: *'(...) we still have, we have our channels where we, yes, I have to encourage the voice, in certain aspects, yes. So if it's, there's still room for development in the student voice (...) Yeah, we give them the opportunities to raise their voice, but I mean we try and give them opportunity after opportunity, because that's always come out in the first instance, so you have to poke at them slightly sometimes, yes, to get their opinion out.'*

Nonetheless, student representation does exist at all levels. The Academic Board has four student members (Council President, Vice President and two others, chosen to represent specific areas as appropriate). The Senior Leader (Quality) explains how student representation at discipline level can be challenging: *'(...) every course board has one or two student reps and in fact we try and have a student rep who's actually a student rep for each group so that hopefully we can get them to come and they are better at attending the course boards because we can sometimes have say three or four first year groups each with a student rep. Hopefully one of those student reps come along.'* This effectively means that student representation at course boards is not always provided by students who take part in that course.

The Student Council itself is a deliberative, consultative group, not included in the formal governance arrangements. The Senior Leader (Quality) explained that the College leadership consults the Council for feedback on regulations and procedures. In case of disagreement between the Council and the College: *'(...) we would look at it again and we would try and find a compromise position but at the end of the day if I say to them that there are certain academic regulations that we have to comply with so we don't have a completely free hand. They do recognise that (...) it is a reasonable student voice and if it was unreasonable I would tell them that they were being unreasonable and/or the principal would ... we would say as much as we might like to be able to do that with you, it is not possible.'* The respondent also confirmed that in the end, the Academic Board would have the final say.

D/SLLT/7

D/SLQ/2

D/SLQ/3

3. Institutional Engagement with students in Quality Assurance in the institution

The College seeks much of its student input through feedback surveys. These are used to comment on a wide range of aspects of the student experience, and termly surveys relate to the student learning experience particularly. The Senior Leader (Quality) explains: *We have always had a number of surveys that have been completed and as you know a lot of universities have a standard end of module survey. We have always had end of module surveys, compliant with partner universities, but also we have had them for non-university [provision] (...) So that's one way the student voice has been captured. (...) the formal communication will come through those surveys. We have an end of induction survey. We have end of module surveys, we have end of year surveys and end of programmes surveys. So there's quite a lot of that what I call formalised data capture. Tick boxes, quantitate and qualitative. It's analysed by group. It is then analysed by course and we can actually then look at it by year or by whole groups. They are looked at first and foremost as part of the course manager's termly report and both termly reports come to something called curriculum management group, which I check. (...) I see every single one of them so as the academic director have oversight of the student learning experience and that's on the formal side.'*

D/SLQ/4

The following up on feedback by the institution is explained by the Academic Leader: *'every term feedback we write a post management report and we have an action plan if there's any (0:09:20.0) be done we raise it and that's been added to that. We're just basically looking to business to be dealt with, how we're going to do it and students are updated on it because they would have meetings on it and then it's formally incorporated usually.'*

D/AL/2

The students do appear to see the survey approach as useful. The Student Voice Leader (Student) said: *'We have our own discussions you know, and we have a feedback form that is completed at the end of each term by every single student and you know, there we can criticize any area of our learning experience from lecturers to the size of the class, to the way the*

D/SVL/2

class is, the way the ... you know, the environment is, the lighting levels, you know, the whole lot. Every little detail we can discuss and we can scrutinise and we can give our opinions on. (...)those feedback forms are then further [0:09:58.1] because I see the other side of the coin as well because I am fortunate enough to be on those meetings where, you know, representing the student voice yet again to see how it's then processed at the institutional level and by sitting in on those meetings, it is debated, it is discussed and noted, and it is duly taken where they say the classroom has adequate lighting, or heating or you know, all these bits and pieces that the students may have concerns about. They are then discussed by the directors and by the board. (...) That goes to the academic board and it also goes to the student council.' Moreover, this interviewee notes that student input in meetings where the outcomes of surveys are discussed, is taken seriously: 'Well those are then discussed as I said to you in the meeting that we have which is in the board meeting. We discuss that to see what has happened in the previous term, how the students have felt about a particular teacher or the unit that they have learnt, what they have experienced, how could it be better then and those sort of programmes are then put into place. [What if a lecturer is not performing well?] Well again we do have those opportunities to discuss with them in confidentiality, we have ... any matter we can discuss, we don't need to take that straight to the lecturer themselves, we can pass that stage and go onto the management side where the lecturers aren't present at that ... in those meetings. (...) That would be difficult in front of them. So in confidentiality, yes, we can discuss if we are not happy with a particular teacher. (...) They would ... yeah, I can imagine if it is discussed with them then the institution has probably their own disciplinary procedures that they would probably need to follow.'

D/SVL/3

Even the surveys themselves benefit from student feedback: 'we're probably going to implement this from next term is, in terms of our feedback, with my next student council meeting, I'm going to put our current feedback surveys to the council and ask them for their input into our surveys. I mean, it's not just the kind of things that we ask from students, in terms of our feedback, whether that's the kind of things that they would want us to ask. So I'm going to give the students the

D/SLLT/8

opportunity to, not redesign our feedback but to tell us the things that they would like us to monitor.’ (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)).

Students are also involved in course design. The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching said: *‘a while ago when we had a redesign of all of our HND courses, the students were involved in designing the courses as such. So to choose the units that needed to be done on the course, and so we involved the students on that level as well, so that we know that the course we’ve provided are the way that the students wanted to. So because on the HND courses you can elect your own module, you can make up the course, we asked the students what are the kind of units that they would like to see on the course and we documented and we had days where we sat with them.’* The Senior Leader (Quality) added to this that alumni are also involved where possible.

More generally, the Student Voice Leader (Student) clarified that quality assurance is much discussed in the College, and puts this in the context of influence of the QAA specifically: *‘I do have knowledge of quality assurance, it’s an institution that sees the quality of academic learning experience is upheld according to the recommendations they make or they have made and the standard that is required by them for the learning provider to deliver to so as far as I’m concerned I think the institution is very hot on that and they’re always talking about this with the lecturers with their students and with their student reps as well and with the rest of the colleagues as well and we always attend the meeting and every single meeting that we’ve attended not a single meeting has gone by without discussing QAA in there. We’ve had visits as well from QAA where they have spoken with me as well as some other students about our learning experience and we have given them our first hand experience as to what we’ve experienced in this particular organisation. That was I think sometime last year if I remember rightly that we had that visit from them and we were invited to have a meeting with them which lasted for a number of hours and there were various different questions that were asked, what our experience was in those avenues*

D/SLLT/9

D/SLQ/5

D/SVL/4

and what we ... how we dealt with it and how the institution dealt with it and I think that was a really good thing to see that you know, QAA's not just there as a body that just says "ok you've got to deliver your standards to this and there's no follow up". So I think it was great to see them at the ground level to see for themselves and set it for themselves and say "yes this institution is delivering to what we require or the standard that we expect or not".

4. Institutional Engagement with students on Enhancement in the institution

The interviewees have not provided evidence to suggest there is a deliberate approach to enhancement based on the student voice beyond responding to (survey) feedback. There are also examples of enhancement based on informal feedback, such as the introduction of presentation skills support for students: *'Well this was all suggested all through the ... with the lecturers, this was the discussions that took ... that took place earlier on in the academic year, in the first year and then it was initiated by a few of the lecturers and before we knew it, it then became part and parcel of some of the learning criteria that you know, you would make it part of your assignment as a role-play part, or maybe a debate part, maybe as a presentation and things like [that].'* (Student Voice Leader (Student)). Similar examples are given in relation to the timing of assessment and support for those not achieving well. In both cases direct (informal) feedback led to changes in support structures. The Academic Leader also referred to these enhancements, showing that the Student Voice Leader's impression was correct. According to the same respondent (Student Voice Leader (Student)) enhancement is also seen by students as a matter for the institution: *'Obviously the institution has their own programme that they need to deliver to and they need to constantly be looking to make inroads into improving their learning systems and procedure that they have. Now they can't just simply rely on what students say because otherwise they'd be laying various different formats throughout the year upon recommendation from term to term basis. Obviously they'll look to see what they're doing at this moment in time and what the general consensus is among the students and if it obviously fits in with their criteria that they're*

D/SVL/5

D/SVL/6

already trying to deliver then albeit then if not then they will see what improvements they can make so long as it's still in line with the criteria that is being met.'

The Senior Leader (Quality) notes there are four routes that instigate enhancement: *'(...) surveys, through forums, through work with the student council, those are the three ways and through looking at the cumulative student feedback.'*

D/SLQ/6

5. The perceived role of students within the institution

Within this College, the nature of the student body has changed considerably due to new national policy and regulation related to the ability of international students to study in the UK. In 2011 the College had close to 3000 students, most of whom were overseas students. The College has lost its share in this recruitment market and is now changing to recruit home/EU students. With current student numbers being around 300, the College has shrunk dramatically and the staff realise that the nature of the student body has also changed: *'It's interesting because I think with regards to tier four students, because they were, they were only allowed in the country because they were studying with a provider, they were very, how can I say? Without sounding too crude, they were easily controllable. (...) they had to be very loyal and they had to follow our rules and they had to do what the college required of them to be able to stay in the country, and my experiences in the past, if you mention something to them like for instance, sorry, we can't deal with this request because it's just not possible for us, they will accept that, whereas with the UK and EU market, they are slightly more demanding and they won't just take no for an answer, and because there is no real thing, tied into you, if they want to leave, they can just leave. They are less [tied]. Yes, so they are, it's very difficult to, I think, manage the attendance of students, of local UK and EU students. Because, I mean on a tier four, they are all, by law, required to attend x number of classes, whereas with UK and EU students, they aren't. So to motivate the students to actually be in attendance sometimes is really a difficult thing to do, because there's no carrot and a stick approach with them, I mean if they don't want to come, they just*

D/SLLT/10

don't come and that's, there's nothing really you can do about it. Yes, it'll impact on their achievement ultimately but they'll only see that when it comes to that point. (...) I think we're reaching the end of our first intake of students now, in October, sorry, they started October 2013, so on the HND, so they're nearing the end of their course now and I think with, we were just in a meeting the other day where we discussed, we need to probably revisit, especially something like attendance, motivating attendance in the college and how we can address that. We've discussed, within the college, that we are dealing with a different beast here, than we did in the past, and also tier four students, with regards to disabilities, we never really saw any international students with disabilities, physical or mental or learning difficulties. (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)).

When asked about the type of relationship the institution has with the student body, the respondents from this College refer to the funding influence on the relationship: *'our tier four international students were more aware of the cost of their course than our UK and EU students are. Because our UK and EU students all study (...) I don't think they have got that same demand in terms of, we are paying so much money for this and therefore you need to give into our word (...) I think our tier four students were much more aware of the amount of money that they paid for their courses (...) Our local students actually pay more slightly, than our tier four students would have in the past, but because it's a loan and because we feel the impact of the money spent immediately, they're not so much aware of that, and they don't really come to me and say, oh well, I have paid this much for my course, therefore you need to do this, that and the other for me, okay? So from a, yeah, from that point of view, it's exactly the opposite way than you would have expected it to go. (...) if you also look at the demographics of our students, in terms of age and background and those kind of things, I think very many of them are of the opinion that it's very unlikely that they'll ever pay the loan back, because of age sometimes. We've got students who are somewhere within their 60's. They've not going to pay it back because after studying they're going to go back onto either state pension or something like that and then, or benefits, and then they'll never earn the required £21,000 to pay it*

D/SLLT/11

back. So I think for very many of them, they don't feel the impact of the loan, ultimately. With regards to how we see our students, we definitely see them as partners, not just as a client or a customer' (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching))

The Senior Leader (Quality) states: *'In this institution I think customer service has a very strong ethic and it links to that. (Interviewer: And is that because of the kind of alternative provider that it is? Or is that something that comes from your governing board?) I think it's possibly because it's the kind of alternative provider it's been. Dealing with a lot of international students knowing that a lot of these guys were a long way from home and they needed support networks cos at one point long before I arrived they only took international students so ... and they were quite big before the visa regulations changed so there has been this ethic of you know, listening to the students, caring for the students, meeting their needs and anticipating needs so it's very much you know, a customer service ethic there. So moving it across more in line with what I've seen in the public funded sector has not actually been that difficult and saying if although we receive students' visa these are domestic in the EU they have a different range of maybe support [needs].'*

D/SLQ/7

Referring to the new cohort of Home/EU students this respondent then says: *'They're probably a mixture between stakeholders and clients. (...) because of the kind of nature of communication that often goes on. There's a lot of communication around the learning programme. Ok? If there's a change to a timetable, reminder about assessments, the need to complete formative assessments, preparation for specific activities and so on. There is also quite a lot of communication around services and that's where they're a client if you like.*

D/SLQ/8

However, considering the Board of Directors, this respondent believes the students would be seen as customers: *'I guess very much as clients. Customers. Very much as sort of a business model which you know, the education is the product and the student is the consumer. If you like you can put it in those kind of words. But remember our board of directors absolutely*

D/SLQ/9

nothing to do with delivery of teaching and learning and in a sense even the kind of the way that we manage the college.'
 Finally this respondent notes that lecturers would see students different again: *'Well I suppose the same way any lecturer would, as learners.'*

D/SLQ/10

However, when the Academic Leader is interviewed, they state that *'for us we view them as a part of a family as well as they are our stakeholders. Yeah, both partners ... it's a combination because not only stakeholders but also like they are responsible directly and indirectly with us but at the same time they are also our partners and we also take them as a bit of a family thing because... yeah, it's a combination.'*

D/AL/3

The Student Voice Leader (Student) has a different view again: *'We are stakeholders. We are considered as stakeholders I would imagine. You know because you're involved and you're valued. If we're not there then you know, the institution isn't going to excel so you know, we are valued, you know, who will deliver their learning expertise to ... teaching expertise to rather, you know, if we are not there. Of course we are an integral part of the institution (...) I think that you need to have satisfaction. You know if you're not delivering to a particular expectation or the experience then you will find that people won't come to you anymore. You know, the whole thing is ... you know, I was recommended by a friend of mine to come to this institution. I could have gone to elsewhere to experience my you know, higher education learning, but I came here because of first hand experience of somebody else that I knew, and what they felt and you know I think it's not just about saying "ok you know, you're my consumer and I'd like to hold on to you and I will please you at whatever it takes", no I think it's a two way thing isn't it really? Students are valued at the same time that they are given that experience they have their own individual voice. A customer has the right to complain at the same time you know, give the institution their business. You know, we ... one can say that maybe we are consumers but stakeholders would mean that you know, you are working hand in hand to try and you know, deliver a particular standard or achieve a particular standard. Tutors want*

D/SVL/7

us to pass. We want to pass so there's a common goal amongst the provider and the receiver, you know. I feel that this relationship you could say that it is consumer-seller's relationship. It would have to be a stakeholder. The interest is common'

In summary, there is no single clear view across this institution regarding the role of the students in relation to their institution. The interviews suggest that this may be because the College is going through a considerable change in terms of the students they recruit, and it is not (yet?) clear on the direction it will take in relation to their student body.

There is one form of engagement with student interests and views which has been noted in other interviewed institutions as well, relating to students being seen as a resource for setting institutional direction. The Student Voice Leader (Student) sets this out as follows: *'We made a presentation before [assignment in business studies class] and that was sent through (...) to the principal of the organisation. I made a presentation of making a suggestion. Two things actually. One was to perhaps have ACCA as a learning provider, you know, we could provide that quite easily in here because a lot of the topics that were discussed in business management covered those accounting [over speaking] so that would be natural progression for somebody who wanted to do a BA into accounting so that they could go into that specialised field after doing their HND and the second one was you know, distance learning. I thought that the way forward now was that you didn't actually need to have students in the class. You could have [learning] through live virtual classes basically. You know, somebody could be sitting on their monitor in Hong Kong and whilst the lecture is taking place in here and through the wireless you know, they can see the lecturers and the lecturer is giving lectures to those who are in the class at the same time the individual is sitting in Hong Kong. But you know, getting everybody connected you know, to make the whole experience just go all over the world is perhaps the way forward. [Interviewer: Did you get feedback?] You'll like this [laughs]. That was great and I think they might be taking up on some of those things and I think already we've got distance*

D/SVL/8

D/SVL/9

learning coming on board as well. This respondent also refers to the Student Charter which is updated once every two years and discussed by the Student Council before formal consideration by the Academic Board.

6. Other findings worth noting

This College is focusing much of its efforts on building towards a sustainable future. Aware that it has international recruiting experience which can benefit other institutions, it has concentrated on this whilst the College's own student numbers declined. The College is now looking to understand the changing national policy and regulations so as to plan ahead. The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) said: *'The fact that the government wants to, or propose to take HNDs out of high education and put it into FE, might have an impact on quite a few other private providers as well in the future, who predominantly focus on the HND delivery, but they have opened, I mean if you go towards degree awarding powers or (...) and validation, those kind of things, you might have a better future than if you just focussed on HND delivery. So it's, the phrase we use in all of the, in the sector, is a level playing field, but it's going to be quite a long journey before we reach the actual level playing field.'* In relation to how the institution engages with students, he foresees new opportunities: *' (...) our review method from the QAA has changed, changing now, I think there's going to be a lot more scope for student participation in our quality assurance, and all the three areas that we have within the quality [0:49:52]. So I think, going forward, there's going to be, we are going to try and depend more, well not depend, encourage students to be more engaged with the development and strategy and those kind of things, and I think it's purely because of the new (...) review methodology that we're going to have to do that.'*

D/SLLT/12

D/SLLT/13

The Senior Leader (Quality) also expects change in quality assurance oversight: *'In terms of QAA and quality assurance, as you might expect, I'm a very firm believer in rigorous quality assurance. I think each institution should have to step up and demonstrate it. I think the frequency sometimes might need consideration. I mean when we just used to do*

institutional audit. Basically we did very little for about five years, four and a half to five years and then we all rushed around like maniacs for about 10 months and put a whole load of information together, I mean I can remember literally four or five room full. (...) I think it's bound to benefit students because it makes the institution reflect on its own practices and a need to show improvement and enhancement and that really is vital and I do believe that you ... every programme should undergo some kind of review every year. What worked, what didn't work, what do we need to change, what do we need to improve and why and then how we're going to do it.'

D/SLQ/11

Appendix 8 - Institution E

Institution facts and sources

Institution E	Facts		Source
1. Does the institution receive public funding other than through the student loan book? (my definition of included institutions)	No 96 declared student fee loans (2012). The majority of students pay directly (£14K).	Interviews with Senior Leaders (Learning and Teaching) and (Quality) http://www.slc.co.uk/official-statistics/full-catalogue-of-official-statistics/student-support-for-higher-education-in-england.aspx Supplementary tables - Breakdown of payments in academic years 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 by individual Higher Education provider Designated: National Statistics <u>Published on 28 January 2014</u>	
2. Does the institution offer any full degree courses? 3. How many degree courses does the institution have, and at what level (postgraduate, first degree or other undergraduate) A postgraduate degree is any degree for which entry requires a first degree. A first degree generally carries the title 'Bachelors of' and sits at level 6 in the UK FHEQ and can include relevant professional	Yes, there are ten undergraduate degrees and another ten postgraduate degrees. Some of these have different pathways including integrated Foundation option. There is also one taught doctorate and some PhD provision.		Interviews with Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) and Senior Leader (Quality) programmes and disciplines provided as per interview and Institutional website.

<p>qualifications. Other undergraduate includes all sub degree HE including CertHE, DipHE, HND, HNC, foundation degrees and professional qualifications (Fielden et al)</p> <p>4. Which subjects are covered?</p>	<p>Accounting, Drama, Business, Film, Finance, Fashion, International relations, Law, Liberal Studies, Management and Leadership, Media, Marketing, Psychology and Psychotherapy</p>	<p>Institutional page on Unistats: http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/institutions/</p>
<p>5. How many students taking part in these?</p>	<p>Approximately 4000 students on taught programmes (2014/15 estimate which includes PGT students). The institution does not publish this data.</p>	<p>Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) interview. HESA does not provide data on private institutions</p>
<p>6. How long has the institutions offered (whole) degree courses?</p>	<p>Taught Degree awarding powers were achieved in 2012 and since then own degrees were awarded. Before then accreditation arrangements existed with other Universities and degree programmes have been offered for at least thirty years.</p>	<p>Senior Leader (Quality) interview</p>
<p>7. Has the institution undergone QAA Educational Oversight process or Institutional Review? When? What was the outcome? Which process was used?</p>	<p>In 2012 the institution underwent review for Taught Degree Awarding powers. The reporting on this is confidential and no other reports are available.</p>	<p>QAA website</p>
<p>8. Any institutional engagement with students observations from QAA reports?</p>	<p>No QAA reports are published</p>	

<p>9. What is the most accurate description of the type of the organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - private, for-profit company, wholly UK owned; - private for-profit company, international ownership; - private, not-for profit company/charity; - campus of non-UK university or college; - private subsidiary of a public institution 	<p>Not for profit, has degree awarding powers (2012) and University status (2013).</p> <p>Student fees are from £14K p.a. upwards for undergraduate degrees and higher for postgraduate degrees.</p>	<p>Interview with Senior Leader (Quality), institutional and QAA website.</p>
Classification of UK private providers by function (Porter et al):		
<p><i>Delivery of Academic content</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering own degrees (using UK degree awarding powers) • Offering own non-UK degree (with accreditation overseas) • Offering own award in partnership with UK institution • Offering an award from a UK institution • Offering own certificated module within (or alongside) a partner university's degree programme • Offering own (overseas) online awards (with no UK face to face support) • Partnership in online course delivery 	<p>Offering own degrees, has degree awarding powers.</p> <p>Research degrees are awarded by the Open University.</p>	<p>Interview, Senior Leader (Quality)</p>
<p><i>Academic support for international students in the UK</i></p>	<p>Does not apply</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>English Language and study skills training</i> • <i>Foundation year programmes</i> • <i>First year programme</i> • <i>Pre-Master's programmes</i> 		
<i>Partnerships in providing content</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Production of course materials under subcontract</i> • <i>Provision of online modules to fit within an institution's virtual learning environment</i> 	Does not apply	
<i>Other types of relationship</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Partnership with private sector in continuing professional development design and delivery for third party clients</i> • <i>Contracted tutorial support in the UK and overseas</i> • <i>Educational testing and assessment services in specialist fields</i> • <i>Granting of accreditation or quality assurance services in professional or technical fields</i> • <i>Agreed articulation into a university's degree programmes from qualifications awarded by a private provider</i> 	Does not apply	

Outline of governance structure:

The institution is overseen by a Board of Trustees which is independently chaired. Within the institution Senate is the most senior committee which has a considerable number of committees answerable to it. One is Senate Learning and Teaching Committee to which the Faculty Learning and

Teaching Committees report. Alongside this sits the Senate Research Committee. There then is a Senate Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee with an Annual Monitoring Subcommittee. The Programme Committees which meet at least once a term at discipline level, report into this strand. Finally there are a Programme and Development Committee (which includes oversight and approval of partnerships) and a Senate Learning Resources Committee.

Alongside the formal governance structure sits an executive management structure, overseen by the institution's Directorate, which has a separate Student Affairs Committee.

Source: This governance structure was described during interviews and cross referenced across all interviews. Some information comes from the institution's website.

QAA findings

In 2012 this institution underwent review for Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP) and was successful. When an institution undergoes this process, the final report does not get published, and previous reports are withdrawn from the QAA website. Therefore no information from this source is available.

Interview findings

Using the five aspects identified in the thesis that shape the way institutions seek to interact with their students in relation to their academic experience, the institution is described below on the basis of the interviews that have taken place. Other findings worth noting are also listed.

1. the arrangements supported by the institution to organise the representation of student views, opinions and interests. In the literature this is often referred to as 'the student voice', suggesting this aspect could be called the *student voice aspect*,
2. the ways of engaging the student voice in the formal and informal institutional decision making, or the '*governance aspect*',

3. any arrangements to engage students in the evaluation and consideration of the quality of the academic student experience or '*quality assurance aspect*',
4. the arrangements made to engage students in the development of the academic student experience or '*enhancement aspect*', and
5. the *perceived role of students within institutions* as shown in the way students are communicated with (and about) in the context of the listed aspects.

1. The Student Voice within the institution

This institution engages with the Student Voice most strongly through student representation. It has a Students' Union consisting of elected student representatives; '*Student reps are elected from within the student body. They're elected on a yearly basis.*' (Senior Leader, Learning and Teaching). The student representatives organise themselves by means of Student Councils, which come together in a Students' Union. '*The Student Union is basically a body that represents all the students within the university, so every student that enrolls at [institution name] is automatically part of the Student Union so there [are] some gradations in which you can be part and engage in the Student Union so we have different roles that outline different tasks in order for us to give the student the best student experience possible. So we have about 15 officers that work part-time for our union, so we don't work with sabbatical officers, yet, we're in the process of trying to get that done, but we're for the moment still working with full-time students. So we have 15 part-time officers who work in different roles representing for example events – academic events, sustainability, but then we have a secretary/treasurer but at the other side we also have the president of all the different schools, so we have the president of our [name] School, of our [name] School, of our Psychology School and those are 7 in total. So those presidents, (...) they all have a council and they bring together that council in the beginning of the year and they are all students who want to be part of it and what they basically do is they meet once a week and they go over potential complaints, ideas, things that have been good...and they can be very specific, they can relate to certain professors or coursework or modules, or they can relate to an*

E/SLQ/1

E/SVL/1

academic event they want to organise from their council or social event they want to do – but they meet every week and that's basically the channel through which we you know, through which we process complaints and that we then try to resolve within the university talking to relevant staff, programme directors etc., etc. (...) they are elected. The presidents of the school they are publicly elected which means that each president has to run a campaign for the school and then the entire school can vote for numerous candidates and then the one with most votes obviously wins. The president also has a vice president and a secretary – those are elected positions as well. So, we have three elected positions per council and everybody who is on the council is non-elected so we call those people representatives and they represent usually the course that they are taking in the university, so we try to have a minimum of one representative per course, per class and then obviously we welcome everybody else who wants to join.' (Student Voice Leader (Student)). There are recognised issues with the system currently in place. One is that there are a limited number of places for student representative roles (elected). These roles are deemed attractive as they allow students to develop skills sets that feature positively on their CVs at a later stage. In some cases this leads to establishing additional councils, or in many cases, appointing to additional roles which are felt to be required (events officer, sustainability officer). In practice this means that student representatives are elected for the more senior roles in all cases (President of SU, President of each Council) but within each of the School Councils and Students' Union there may be a mixture of elected and appointed representatives. It was clear from interviews with staff that this led to a lack of clarity about the role of Councils and representatives.

Another issue the Students' Union is considering is its independence: '*... one of our main objectives is to be able to question the university, to work together with the university, but also question the university and there is sometimes conflict of interest when we try to achieve something but obviously we're still funded by the university, we need that budget, and sometimes we have to make compromises which is ok, but we like to generate an opinion of our own. We also like to organise certain events or gatherings independently, raising money independently and those are things that are very*

E/SVL/2

difficult when you work with a university...a charitable university right, because it's a non-profit university, which means that whatever event or whatever thing we organise, if we want to make a profit our budget doesn't roll over. So it's very hard for us to then try to build you know, the student union and try to improve our facilities, if we can't generate (...) considerable income, so that's one of the reasons. This does not mean that we're not happy working together with the university, I mean we have a very good relationship with the university but it's something that if we look across the country, we see that most student unions are independent and it just gives a lot more flexibility ...' (Student Voice Leader (Student)). Some of this financial dependence also relates to student fees, with a number of the representatives receiving a 15% rebate on their student fees. Yet this lack of financial independence does not appear to limit the experienced level of influence the representation system has, according to the same respondent: *'I think there's a lot of special things about our university and our students but in specific towards our relationship...I mean I think we are very well respected, I think we're heard, I think we're not only respected by you know the people below directorate we're also respected by the trustees, by the board, the CEO, the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor, our voice is very much heard by them.'* Nonetheless, the Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) notes that the independence issue has a further disadvantage in that the Union cannot be a member of the NUS.

E/SLLT/1

Interestingly, throughout the interviews it appears that ensuring that the right kind of student representative collective is experienced as crucial to having Degree Awarding Powers (DAP)—even though the institution has had these since 2013. At that time, the DAP process initiated change to the representation arrangements: *'...we've been homogenised through by getting taught-degree awarding powers and the title, so one of the things that we used to have was – we still have it but it's [not] so prominent – was we used to have student councils and that's how we engaged with them but once we'd decided we were going taught-degree awarding powers, we helped found student councils into a student union, so we've given them a budget, we've given them funding.'* (Senior Leader (Quality)). The Academic Leader interviewed notes it is perhaps

E/SLQ/2

<p>both the DAP process and the influence of a new senior leader has been of influence: <i>'I think it was pretty much to do with – as I said – a new Dean of Students coming in and sort of trying to put in structures that would be clearly understood by somebody going through taught-degree awarding powers and that was one of the concerns when we were actually assessing our own institution back then, there was this concern that others wouldn't understand what we were doing and that...my recollection of when we were going through it, the actual degree awarding power thing itself, there were certain points in the questioning where academics from across the land just didn't understand what we were doing.'</i></p>	E/AL/1
<p>The institution revisits the organisation of the student voice regularly: <i>'There is certainly a sense that we need a clear student voice. We need to be able to identify people who we can go to and get student input for things and to be able to include them in decisions that are going to affect both them and future students. I think to be frank there is also a kind of QAA element there in feeling that the kind of national expectation is to have student presentation. So occasionally we find ourselves kind of reopening the question of what is appropriate for students to attend and why.'</i> (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)). And yet, the same respondent suggests that some movement on the Student Voice is not institutionally driven: <i>'I think it may sometimes be a case of we do certain things at the beginning because we feel we should do them either because the QAA is interested in them and/or because we thought the QAA inspectors for TDAP would be interested in them whether they were or not in eventuality. And I think we sometimes start by doing things because we think externally people will expect us to do them and then once we're doing them we actually discover that there are real benefits and it's not just a tick box exercise.'</i></p>	E/SLLT/2
<p>However, whilst the student representation system is seen as core to hearing the student voice by central staff, the Academic Leader suggests that direct contact with staff is also important: <i>'We hope that we're small enough that students get to know all the staff so they can always go and talk to module leaders or programme directors and work within the</i></p>	E/AL/2

faculty, sort of the hierarchy, if you like. So if they don't get the answer that they want or the information they want they can work their way up through that. (...) And they've got access to the Dean as well (...) we have offices just opposite each other and she's very happy to see students as well. She also regularly sees the student reps for each of the schools. So without our faculty we have four schools and each of the schools have got presidents for their student union.'

In summary, the Student Voice arrangements focus on direct and represented contact with the institution. These arrangements have undergone change and are continuing to do so. It is further noteworthy that none of the interviewees made reference to understanding students' interests and feedback through feedback surveys or similar, unless prompted in reference to quality assurance mechanisms.

The Student Voice Leader (Student) notes that other future developments for the Union are also on the cards: *'I'm the last non-sabbatical officer so from next year onwards the elections will be sabbatical so the president position will be the only sabbatical position. We have strived a long time to achieve it because as of now we are not fully independent right, so we are funded by the university and we're trying to make steps in order to become independent so the first step in a way is to have a sabbatical president, who takes up obviously a lot more work and can engage in further activities on the next level to put it that way.'*

E/SVL/3

2. Institutional Engagement with students within Governance in the institution

Students are represented at every committee within the institution, with the exception of the Directorate (executive senior management meetings). However, a Student Affairs Committee that is chaired by a student and consists largely of students reports directly into the Directorate: *'That's obviously student issues so I think the students chair that one and we*

E/AL/3

have representation from across the university and obviously the students and that's where any issues that they've raised or whatever they proceed straight into directorate.' (Academic Leader).

There is some level of contradiction in the four interviews about which groups the student delegates on Senate and its sub-committees represent, ranging from suggestions that *'there are two undergraduate student reps and two post graduate student reps on the senate learning and teaching committee.'* (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)), to *'we have students on all of our major Senate Committees so we have two students on each...not two, two or three, it depends on the committee but usually it's one from under-graduate, post-graduate and typically someone from the American School as well. So they'll be usually three. We have them on...well I'd say all of them...'* Students are not only represented at institutional level, but also at discipline level: *'All programmes have what we call programme committee meetings at least once a term. Students are the only people that have to attend those because if they can't attend the meeting isn't quorate'* (Academic Leader).

E/SLLT/4

E/SLLT/5

E/AL/4

The Student representatives have training and advice to support them. The Senior Leader (Quality) explained: *'we have a member of staff, a Student Engagement Manager, who sits in the Student Union, and he's there as the first port of call for the students and as well as that, the student representatives have received training in the past from the Academic Registries Path – to the roles and blah, blah, blah and what's expected of them. So when we've got people ready for committees...I mean we do this for our own staff as well – my quality officers will meet with people and explain how it all works... (...) I can't remember the last time a student's walked in and just said 'can I have a chat with you about something?' (...) I've had it where the students have emailed me and some of the ones on the Student Union ask to talk to me about some things, I've done that. But...don't get me wrong, in terms of academic advice and stuff like that, they're not*

E/SLQ/3

shy about going to their academic colleagues, but in terms of the committees and stuff like that, they're pretty ok and now that we've actually got the Union up and running and they've been trained, they've become a bit more active'.

Less than a year before the interviews took place, a student representative had also joined the Board of Trustees and this was felt to illustrate the institution's interest in the student voice. Other examples of student influence on strategic matters were also given: *'in terms of strategy, a strategy has been in front of Senate so they've been as part of that but they've been [part of] working groups – so when we were doing 'preparing for taught-degree awarding powers' they contributed there by having representatives on different groups that we had, and I'm just trying to think back to the strategy bit...over the years there have been things where we've drawn up strategies that the students have been consulted as well you know, asked for their thoughts and views...that's going back a while though...I've not had that sort of connection with the directorate for a while now so you'd have to ask somebody on directorate where they are with that and how students contribute. But I mean students do contribute to those types of discussion and one of the things I suppose we are slightly different to everyone else – we worry about getting students involved in everything – whether it's for the right reasons or the wrong reasons, I'm not sure.'* (Senior Leader (Quality)).

E/SLQ/4

Questions regarding the involvement of students and their genuine influence arose in other interviews as well. The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) said *'I think we include students in too many different forums, at some of which they don't have anything to say and feel sometimes intimidated and certainly outnumbered by academic colleagues, and I would be in favour of having at least some forum in which the students outnumbered the staff and where they could genuinely get their ideas, opinions and feedback through without feeling somewhat at a loss. And I think we have a bit of an issue also with training, when most of the representatives are doing it on top of their degree, the issue of training them so that they can actually contribute well and make the most of the representation that they're doing I think is an ongoing one. So we have a*

E/SLLT/6

bit of a scattergun approach where we have students on everything and I personally don't think that's the best use of their time. (...) Some of the decisions are on cycles that are longer than a year, for instance, and so we've had situations where the student council membership completely changed and we had a very different opinion from one year to the next. They also have different levels of engagement depending on individuals and teams and the dynamics. But also they're sometimes jargon filled and even potentially philosophical or sometimes esoteric discussions that go on in some of the committees that require years of attendance and familiarity with all the sort of discourses to be able to properly engage with them and so you are sometimes, for instance ... I would find we were in a committee to discuss one thing and a student, genuine student issue about something completely irrelevant will come up because it touched a nerve or reminds them of something that students have been telling them and the very fact that they've raised it in a committee that might not be the best committee for it. To me it's further evidence that they are not being sufficiently prepared for some of the engagement that we are offering currently.'

Similarly, the Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) noted that *'We have programme committees but programme committees are ... again, the students are outnumbered by the staff. The programme director chairs those programme committees and the programme director is a bit like God in the programme in the sense that they're quite likely to know everything or to know certainly substantially more than any other single person does. And again the agendas are often driven by what the staff want to put on the agenda and students I don't think ... I think it probably varies but I don't think the students necessarily get to see a sufficient closing of the loop in terms of when they make suggestions do they actually see actions that are affecting them whilst they are still students or do we close that circle, do we close that loop properly. I don't think we necessarily do particularly well.'*

E/SLLT/7

Yet the Academic Leader and the Student Voice Leader (Student) have a more positive view. The Academic Lead stated in the context of student representatives on committees that *'they definitely have a voice. Absolutely they do. They are very confident. The students are very confident. I think they generally enjoy attending. They are treated very well by other members of staff. They're treated as equals. They are asked for their opinion. They will offer their opinion even if not asked. We have the option of asking them to leave if there are things that are inappropriate. So, for example...HR matters or finance matters, those sort of things. But I've not actually seen it happen in practice. So yeah, there is always good attendance. I can't remember going to a meeting where a student hasn't been present actually. They are pretty good. (...)* The impression I get is that they appreciate and enjoy being part of the governance, being part of the structure of making decisions and what decisions are being made. I think we tend to see the same students because it's the ones who are obviously engaged. And I guess my only concern is how widely it gets populated to the rest of the student population. But that's always an issue isn't it.'

The Student Voice Leader (Student) said: *'I think people within the university very much respect the students' opinion because at the end of the day we're obviously the most important thing within the university so you know all our officers are trained, they are usually people who are not scared to talk about certain topics or express their opinions (...) so yeah that's obviously part of the selection process that those people are confident in an environment where they need to speak up...and mostly what we try to prepare them for or how we prepare them is a very I think normal way, we just try – every argument we try to have a good line of argument with enough backing, enough evidence, critical mass, relevance, so it's never...an officer will never go into a meeting unprepared or uninformed or expressing an individual opinion. So everything we present is backed by some kind of data or whatever we have so that...we just try to take it as seriously as possible and I think the people who are working, so the staff at the university, they respect that and they are actually very willing to listen, yeah. Obviously there's politics and sometimes you feel in a position where you can't do as much as you want which is I think normal and natural, but I haven't come across major issues with regards to that yet.'*

E/AL/5

E/SVL/4

3. Institutional Engagement with students in Quality Assurance in the institution

In common with regular quality procedures students at this institution give feedback on their courses through questionnaires. The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) explains that *'on the particular modules they do because we have an actual written module evaluation feedback for every module and we have a fairly high response rate on those. But that's obviously very micro level. (...) They're discussed at programme level and then they're discussed in faculty learning and teaching committees. (...) [Students] are (...) present. [So presumably your students would know what happens to the outcomes?] Yes, they do. (...) And that has had some impact in terms of the data that's presented. So, for instance, the statistical data is presented at learning and teaching committees but the pre-handwritten comments are not presented because sometimes students might even name the lecturers in their free comments. So we don't project those and they're not circulated to all faculty learning and teaching committee members. But our line managers, heads of school, head of department would have the full non-redacted version of those module evaluations.'* The Academic Leader recognises that the end of module feedback is not always enough; *'It's very, very frustrating because suddenly you end up with a very serious issue that could have been addressed much earlier in the cycle and then that can be very troublesome. So yeah, I think those are the certain issues but I think ultimately what we are trying to do is give students a very clear route for being able to speak with staff. But as I said right at the beginning actually, the feedback when we've been looking at learning and teaching and assessment strategy, some feedback has sort of said 'well, we don't feel we've got one to one support, we don't feel we're getting visibility of staff, or enough visibility and enough sort of one to one time'. So we're clearly not quite getting it right all the time.'* The Student Voice Leader (Student) recognises the issue but has a somewhat different explanation: *'To be honest, it works to a certain extent but what's holding it back is the size of the organisation I think. The size...there is a quite a lot of bureaucracy so things tend to go quite slow and there's a lot of committees, a lot of senate meetings, sub-senate committees, and you know, every complaint or every major complaint needs to go through all of them and if something for whatever reason goes to the next step – the second or third step – and there is a little point*

E/SLLT/8

E/AL/6

E/SVL/5

that is not relevant or doesn't comply with whatever they want to discuss at that meeting it goes back to step 1 so some things can take a very long time and I would say that's the biggest issue. (...) Well there is obviously different approaches to a problem ok, there can be minor problems, there can be major problems and major problems you know if there's something that really went wrong in a lecture or a tutor or a student that's you know misbehaving in a particular way, then action will be taken quicker if there is enough evidence provided obviously, but a usual complaint takes quite a long time and as union representing a student it can be sometimes quite frustrating that things you know don't get done quicker but it's the way it is unfortunately.'

The Academic Leader also explains that whilst student give feedback *'they are indirectly [involved in Annual Monitoring] because all the module evaluations for annual monitoring and it's part of the duty of the programme director who writes the descriptive words around that. So they would therefore be taking all the feedback from programme committees and future evaluations. But they wouldn't be part of any of that sort of development if you like or writing that report.'* Whilst students are not involved in the drafting of annual reports, they are represented at the evaluation of annual data and reports: *'So that's usually the presidents of our councils because they represent the students within each school and they are then part of that meeting, they can look into the people who graduated for example, the grades, but all general grades, the amount of people who had to re-sit, all of that, so they are part of those meetings yeah. I've been to one of those meetings quite recently and they...the university presents those numbers and as a student you obviously have a very different perspective to why certain things happen and that perspective is heard (...) I think it could be better in a sense that we project what we think, we do it through you know...we don't make written reports about it. I think that's something we could do, you know, have a report from the union so we come into the meeting with a report on what we think instead of just a verbal update...I think that could help integration because that would make it easier to minute everything.'* (Student Voice Leader (Student)).

E/AL/7

E/SVL/6

The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) notes there has been a reward related discussion about the use of survey responses: *'Certainly when we talk about reward for staff and we do have a small, what do you call it, performance related pay element introduced over the last couple of years. Whenever the issue of relating performance related pay to student feedback comes up we always have a debate then because people quite rightly identify that the reasons why students make the comments and/or ratings that they do in a module could be very, very varied, and what we don't want to encourage is people to make assessments very easy to please their students and therefore get a good rating on the student module. And I certainly know – I was external examiner up at an institution a few years ago - where the publication of the student rating use of their lecturers was the most eagerly anticipated intensely awaited moment in the whole of the academic year, more than results, more than RA or REF results- more than anything. And I worry when you get to that stage where it's almost like a kind of beauty contest with two of the most popular academics. So we've had debates when those types of issues come up, we will debate it then, but I don't recall ever being part of a broader philosophical debate around that.'*

E/SLLT/9

E/SLLT/10

In relation to programme development, the Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching states; *'And then we have student representatives involved in all redesign and revalidation programmes.'* The Academic Leader explains further that *'they are involved. So they are always on the validation panel. So we always have student representation on the student panel. (...) It's normally one student. (...) normally the panel will have representation from both faculties. It'll be chaired by a member of the alternate faculty and there will be usually two external panel members who are subject experts. So yes, the students are involved in that. It depends on the programme that's being developed. They might be asked to complete questionnaires. If it's a new programme we might be asking their views on 'would this be of interest to you?' If it's a postgraduate programme 'what sort of things do you want to see in this area? Or whatever. So it will depend on the programme. They don't necessarily get involved in the programme development so their views may well be asked.*

E/AL/8

<p><i>They're on the panel.'</i> The Student Voice Leader (Student) points out that the revalidation process is particularly onerous and student involvement is rewarded: <i>'every revalidation is a big chunk of work I must say, and we have one student union officer appointed for each re-evaluation and that is a lot of work and they get compensated for it as well, so they are part of the meeting, they are part of the workgroup, and they meet on a regular basis with regards to re-evaluating programmes so they can look into all the data and they give feedback and they brainstorm together with other staff members.'</i></p>	E/SVL/7
<p>Some of the institutional respondents give examples of how they would wish to see the Student Voice used for a specific (own) quality related agenda. The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) said; <i>'I believe that a bit of pressure externally in terms of what we're projecting as an institution on teaching and learning might actually do us some good. I think within the institution I think there is a sense that we want to be more and more like other universities without losing some of the things that are special and so there is a desire to be moving into things like the NSS. I think there's also recognition that at the moment we would not necessarily come out very favourable in the NSS for various reasons. That might be mitigating the general direction of travel. So we do a student satisfaction survey annually and it is very closely mirrored to the NSS for I think pretty good reasons.'</i></p>	E/SLLT/11
<p>The Academic Leader who deals with the internal survey that mirrors the NSS notes: <i>'the reality is we're still learning out of our first year and actually I've just realised what I should have done is been tracking the action plans were developed by the heads of schools and I had assumed the heads of schools were then following that up. (...) And what I probably should have done is had an agenda item on SLTC for them to update. (...) And that's something that I will do this year and that way the students would have had visibility of that.'</i> The Student Voice Leader (Student) adds that the questionnaire is not the only way in which cross programme feedback is given: <i>'there is a lot of workgroups and those workgroups are – I think they consist of about 6 people from different departments, different points of view and there's always one student</i></p>	<p>E/AL/9</p> <p>E/SVL/8</p>

representative in that workgroup and that's usually an executive member from our student union – so they brainstorm about different programmes, different approaches and things that we prefer so yeah, there is definitely that' and 'What you have as well is the outcomes of certain surveys you see that certain departments within our university or certain student groups don't respond as much as others so then what I usually see is the actual Head of School together with the Programme Director, takes time in class to ask a couple of questions towards the student and they do that actually on quite a regular basis so they'll probably come in once or twice a semester to get some feedback from students who haven't given enough yet. I mean, yeah, some people don't like them because they interrupt the class but others appreciate it so in that sense they do it that way, yes.'

E/SVL/9

Whilst the above sets out a range of ways of seeking feedback from students and evaluating this feedback often with students involved in these, in the interviews there is only once made reference to formal staff-student liaison committees, which are common in other institutions. Here they are called 'Programme Committees'. The senior Leader (Quality) explains: *'a programme committee is a meeting once a year with representatives from the student body for that programme and they meet their team, you know, their academic team and they will discuss matters of relevance and they will pick out key points from within the annual monitoring reports and discuss things there. To be honest with you, I've done this in a number of institutions and you can call it a number of things, Student-Staff Liaison Committee, that type of thing, and inevitably it comes down to the students moaning about either car parks or you know, things like that, but you know...it is laughable but they do use it for that, and they might complain about how much money you're giving the Student Union...rarely do they talk about things that really matter in terms of academic input. I mean these Programme Committees they do talk about it and the only way they can really get them to talk about that is if you try to prime them before they come and sort of explain to them what the purpose of the meeting is and...but usually it's that thing about...it's not like institutional learning where you have knowledge passed on from one to the other and all that – what happens*

E/SLQ/5

usually is the student representatives get appointed and the old ones disappear and they don't ever pass...you know, a handover or anything like that. So you end up having this thing where you're in a constant state of explaining things to them. So in terms of the actual student feedback from those committees, it is listened to, it's documented and the feedback will be addressed in two ways, one if it's an easy thing it will be dealt with relatively easily at a local level. If it's something that's raised as of interest at a higher level in the institution, it will come back through the minutes with an action point and it will be raised through the committee structure.'

At a different level, the Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) notes that student engagement with the institution is really only with the institution where students study, but does not extend to the validating institution: '*... getting a student to engage in events can be incredibly difficult and one of the stories I suppose thinking back on this, this happened over the last couple of years, I did mention earlier two of our validators –[names of validating institutions] – now, [name of institution] have every year asked our students if they'd like to attend graduation ceremonies, if they'd like to go down and have meetings and all the rest of it, in all those years, not once have our students wanted to go down there. And none that have that I know of. [name of institution] asked if we would like to get our students to attend a couple of events and we tried it again with them and our students wouldn't go and it wasn't that they weren't interested in the subject, it was 'why would we want to go all the way down there?' it's like they have no interest in doing that and because they would see that their issue is here on site, not with the validators. And I suppose the reason I'm saying this is that if you're looking at student engagement and you looked beyond somebody who is being...who has been validated by others, they're more interested with the ones who are actually doing the programme with rather than the validators. So they weren't interested in that respect with their university because their university technically – although they're doing the course here – is actually (...) It's not what they relate to.'*

E/SLLT/12

4. Institutional Engagement with students on Enhancement in the institution

The interviews show that Enhancement activity is mostly in response to student feedback and often closely related to governance activity. The Senior leader (Quality) states that enhancement is *'Within my brief...although I've got the enhancement bit in my committee, it's more to do with...what I do is more to do with actions arising out of different reports at an institutional level.'* Nonetheless when enhancement activity takes place, the same Senior Leader (Quality) notes: *'I mean it depends on the question but usually if I'm running something I get as many people involved as I possibly can, so I would have staff, students and the lady down the road!! Anyone who can contribute I'd be looking to get them involved. It really depends on what it is, so if we were to talk about for example, the transitional arrangements that we put into place for when we got our...let's think about this...when we put the transitional arrangements in for those students who were moving from one set of programmes to another, when we took over [another institution], there were discussions with the students as part of the transitional arrangements project but only in the bits that really related to them and that they would understand. [So that's more consultative rather than developmental?] Yeah. The developmental part would really fall under the Deputy Vice Chancellor, and the Dean of Students might have some but it's really the DVC's brief.'*

E/SLQ/6

E/SLQ/7

The Student Voice Leader (Student) confirms the reactive approach: *'usually [enhancement] comes out of the complaint box. So there's a number of complaints coming from surveys, from emails, whatever individual complaints have arisen by the union or by teachers who you know are experiencing things and raise it towards the programme directors or course leaders – so you know, the things that go wrong, they then examine those and look at how they can improve it. What they also look at is the results so if they see that a certain module, the students did really badly as opposed to other modules where they were great, then there's some kind of issue as well so...you'll then look at what did the professor offer, how were the class dynamics, have they done a lot of group work, a lot of individual work, what may have affected this or that...so I would say there's quite extensive...yeah, data analysis in a way and then they work with workgroups to try and*

E/SVL/10

resolve it to come up with ideas to make things smoother and better for the students. (...) But I mean, usually it's raised by students but I would say that staff is also quite regularly self-evaluating, so yeah they'd look at different institutions, what works, what doesn't and then they'd look at themselves and say ok, they try to evaluate themselves as well...' It is also clear though that there may be a change towards more student driven enhancement. The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) stated: 'That's a really important point, and certainly since I've taken up my new role 18 months ago I do now go and directly meet with the Student President and just check what the issues are that he has and what students are telling him and I'm hoping that as we move forward I will have within academic practice theories of secondment. Now, we're assuming that most of those secondments will come from academic staff and teaching staff but there's no reason why some of the projects that they're working on should not also either originate from or at least include issues that are, or ideas that are, generated from the student body. I think we need to be more open to that.'

E/SLLT/13

This does not mean that student do not have a strong voice in strategic developments. The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) explains: *'I have four student members of the working party for the institutional learning, teaching and assessment strategy that I mentioned earlier. So we do have students involved in the enhancement side, I think quite considerably. They also will often be part of more local sort of learning design type projects. So one of the projects that comes under my remit at the moment is we're introducing from September an undergraduate first year common module which all undergraduates will be taking. That's going to be called Global Prospectives. And the student members of the working party that have designed that module were very, very hands on. They have attended all the meetings and they are going to continue to be involved in that module on an ongoing basis in terms of actual input into the line of it. So I think some of the things that we've done that were more kind of around formal structure and committees have started to feed into other areas where there wouldn't necessarily be formal requirement to include students but we realise that actually including students is a great thing.'* The Academic Leader explains the students' involvement in the development of that

E/SLLT/14

common module further: *'They play a part as part of the learning and teaching assessment. We're having regular meetings and there are representatives from both the faculties and we also have a language institute so representatives from there. Then we have usually I think it's between three and four students are invited both from under grad and post grad, so there's a really broad input from the student population. And our DVC is part of that committee as well. So it spans across the university from all the different levels if you like and also from the students.'* The Academic Leader also provides an example of how the Student Voice has influenced strategy further: *'Our existing [learning, teaching and assessment strategy] finishes in 2015 and so we are just doing one now for 2015 to 2020. So one of the aspects that has sort of been drawn out from various interviews with students and sort of feedback is their need to really feel that they have individual support from staff. Given that we are a very relatively small institution we feel that that's something we should be doing if we're not already and so we're currently looking at that as a priority.'*

E/AL/10

E/AL/11

Finally, the respondents commented on the process involved in establishing clarity for students on what is expected of them and what they can expect from the institution – a policy driven enhancement activity in HE. *'We have a draft student charter. (...) Basically we've had a change in our senior leadership. We have as of January a new [title of senior role], and so as often happens when you have someone into a key new role like that certain things that we thought were nearly finished now look as if they're not nearly finished because he had a very different take. (...) So the team of students who had drafted a student charter has been quite recently sent back to radically rework it. So we will have a student charter but at the moment we have a draft. (...) It's done together. I think there are more students than staff on that group. I have a feeling there's a group of about six and I think maybe four of them are students. But they do then come back to the senate learning and teaching committee for further iteration, yes. So they don't go away and produce something and it's just accepted. (Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching)). The Senior Leader (Quality) –who is not the senior mentioned- said: 'the [title of senior role] has been charged with that and he's been working with the Student Union to actually come up with*

E/SLLT/15

the wording for that but we've run into some difficulties which, if I'm being absolutely honest, the difficulties were me! I wasn't happy with some of the promises that were being made – because the thing is a charter is a charter, it shouldn't be a legal document and the way it was written it looked like a legal document where promises were being made and (...) you know, it was just the way it was worded, the way some of the students had come up with it. So it's been knocked back and again, there was a working item to bring it up to get it the way it needs to be. But my principal question for...that's what I'm saying with that, it wasn't just the Student Charter, the Student Charter was connected to the work that I wanted done on...it was about definitions on different types of programmes and the level of support that they were getting, so as well as setting out that review of students, it was starting... not a review but writing a Student Charter, there was also the question of what we'd set up a Course Definitions Operations Group – that group was charged with defining what type of programmes should get what level of support and part of that was also connected with 'what is a student?'.

E/SLQ/8

Noting the earlier mentioned emphasis on bureaucratic approaches as experienced by academic staff and the student representation, it is worth noting that the remit of an operations group required a principle statement (charter) to be changed. This was a staff leadership driven change in direction. The Student Voice Leader (Student) did not refer to the Student Charter.

E/SVL/11

5. The perceived role of students within the institution

In this institution no single response prevails to describe the role of students. This may be because there has not been a discussion about student engagement specifically, and senior management changes are taking place. The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) notes *'There have been debates in the context of other things. There hasn't been a debate that's been trained entirely around student engagement, if you see what I mean. We've tried to consider student engagement*

E/SLLT/16

with other sort of strategic areas and quality areas but there's never been anything that's been absolutely sustained on the student engagement side in its own right.'

As a result there are varying opinions about the role of students in the institution. The Senior Leader (Quality) said: 'You know, in terms of the students – and this is the thing – if we're talking about our undergraduate students, I think of them as students, I don't think of them as customers (...) – a student comes to us, and it's the same way that they would go to any other institution and what they're paying for is an education. They're not paying for a degree, they're not paying for anything like that, they're paying for an education and they're possibly paying a little bit extra for the luxury of taking a degree in the middle of [prestigious address]. And in that respect a student is a student, they're here to learn and that's the way I see them, and for me, it's all about having an excellent relationship with that student and providing good services academically and otherwise so that they can actually achieve what they're here to do and that's to get a degree. But it's up to them ...'

E/SLQ/9

The Academic Leader notes: 'I think there are probably different views. It's a very interesting question because actually I think you get very different perspectives depending on who you ask actually in different areas. (...) I think even across different academics I think there will be a different view. Some, depending on their background – I was just speaking to a lecturer earlier today and their view is very much that it's a partnership and they work with the students because it's very practical and they're working together, they're helping the students almost move off into their own practice, developing those skills. Others would say very much that they are acting in terms of a much more tutor led education process, and I think it really depends on the area of activity. The danger of having this sort of we're all on a level sort of thing and we're working in collaboration, I think it's a very dangerous area because ultimately you've got somebody who's in a position of power, as in the tutor, who ultimately can give grades.(...) And so if you're trying to say 'well, we're all equal and we're just

E/AL/12

here to work with you' then I think that's not necessarily valid and I think the students would struggle with that because suddenly if they cross that boundary it's a very tenuous area, a very difficult one. (...)I would think everybody would probably say it's collaborative and it's very much they're seen on a par, they're not looked ... there's no differentiation. Students attend all of those, the learning and teaching, whether it's quality, learning and teaching programme development. They are equal partners in that. I think that would be my view.' The same Senior Leader also says: 'I do think there's an interesting one in terms of ... and I don't think it's just for alternative providers but this expectation now, this link almost between – I guess we've had it for some time but I guess you guys are getting this more and more is the client. They are paying for what they get and it's a tricky balance between listening to them and almost saying 'no, this is better for you' because there's the sort of clash, you know, we expect them to attend, we expect them to do everything we ask in terms of delivering all their assessments and classwork and whatever, but equally they could turn round to us at some point and say 'well, we don't think the quality was there' or 'we don't think this was there'. So they have a voice and they should have a voice but I think it's very interesting what they think they're paying for sometimes and I think maybe even some of the weaker students may not really in a position to select so therefore we have students based on ... obviously then we have admissions criteria but beyond that we have a very broad spectrum of students in terms of ability and that's very difficult because if they've paid very high fees and they're not really doing very well, it's a bit like private schools, parents expect them to achieve really well even when perhaps they're [there is an ability issue] So I think those are issues that I think we have and I think they will become more and more predominant as fees have increased in state sector.'

E/AL/13

However, the Student Voice Leader (Student) has a different view and notes the client role of students alongside the partnership role in the way students are being treated: 'In a way, they try their very best to not look at us as consumers or clients, but at the end of the day it's what keeps the university going if we're still there. So either way they try to improve things, they're always looking at a very long term, sustainable way in which they can not only attract students but satisfy

E/SVL/12

them. So satisfy them when looking at learning and teaching, that's obviously a very sensible thing because you don't want to satisfy your students too much because then everything becomes incredibly easy right? (...) But that's probably not the best way to go about it you know? So in terms of learning and teaching, they really look at other institutions, they get feedback but then the whole campus experience, the whole student lifecycle you know, coming in and out, the people you meet, the network you might create, the people you are in touch with in different departments, whether it be alumni or careers, they really...they do their very best to give the best experience possible and then the question is of course...do they look at us as student individuals or do they look at us as the driving force behind the institution? I would say it's a balance between both. I think in an ideal world they should never look at us as clients, but they should look at us in a way they would like to improve the way we learn, the way we question the world, the way we enrich ourselves, there is always a commercial aspect because at the end of the day it's obviously...we talk about university and you know, we tell our friends to come, they'll grow a bigger student base. (...) I think the institution would say the same. You know, you can't treat a student as a client because they are... technically speaking they are but they're not, if you start treating a student as a client they're probably going to run away as fast as possible, so they you know, they are aware of the fact that there are certain standards to live up to and they always try to enhance and improve it to give us the best possible experience but then I think they really care about us as individuals as well so they try to give us and provide services that will help us in the future, they really try to exploit all the networking possibilities – the teachers obviously have no sense of students being a client, they teach because they're passionate about teaching and because they're passionate about giving something back and making us learn something so...most students' direct contact with professors in lectures and seminars are not at all driven by consumerism at all, that's an element that only jumps in when you're I think in a position like me or if you're in a student union, then that's when you start to realise it... (...) one way students might realise it as well is, you know, school fees that might increase in price of certain things...'

In relation to the type of relationship the institution has with the Students' Union the Student Voice Leader (Student) states: *'I mean partnership...the student union basically is a partner (...) I would, I mean, partners, yeah we work together very closely, I think students are in touch with the university very closely, they ask for feedback a lot, not only by the big organisations but also by their professors, there's a lot of individual time that goes into that – a lot of one on one time – I would say yeah, we could describe it as a partnership but then again in a partnership it's a 50/50 relationship and that's not really the case. (...) Because I think that as a student you come to university, you're expected to refuse certain things, to get learning outcomes, to come to university...so the biggest contribution is the university, they provide the resources, they provide... [So there is some element of the one partner being the provider and the other partner being the receiver in there?] Yes.'*

E/SVL/13

The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) notes an unusual relationship between students, the influence of their (relatively high) fees and the style of senior leadership in relation to these: *'What we sometimes get is, despite all the processes that we have, we'll have students going directly to the VC and then the VC ordering someone to do something about it, and (...) I think that that's not the way that we should be doing things. I think it's disempowering for the people who provide those services to be told by the VC to do something when they should just be dealing with it in the first place. I also think that can sometimes create the idea of the student as customer. And I think as a private, although not for profit institution, we do sometimes struggle with the idea of just how responsive to student demands we should be. And there are certain ... I mean, I can stereotype this a little bit and say that there are some people, for instance in the business school who have a very client orientated philosophy and sometimes the pressure from them will be to just do what students want, full stop. And I've been in discussions where people have had to say 'hang on, no, this is not the same as a client culture where the customer is always right'. You can't have that in universities because we have some absolute standards. But I think that there are some issues sometimes around whether students are customers or not. I think that quite a lot of*

E/SLLT/17

people would probably say in an ideal world students would be partners but they also acknowledge the fact that in the reality of the world we live in that's not always going to work because students understandably are more interested in the degree that they're going to get personally than they are in the longer term institutional priority. And so that has to be, I think that has to be, sort of carefully handled. Sometimes when you ask students what they want, they want you to make changed to the degree that they are in and of course you can't do that from a regulatory point of view. So yes, I think we do sometimes struggle with the extent with our responsive to students. And certainly I notice, if I compare it to my time in state universities, I would have always felt that if I held an academic line as a point of principle I would be more likely to be supported in that from the very top to the very bottom of the institution than I would be here.'

The Academic Leader confirms that the direct involvement of the VC who is aware of the fee related expectations is something that changes the way students are seen within the institution: *'I think this is probably quite unique to us but nevertheless I think when you've got students who ... so I'm not trying to generalise, so this is can't be across all students but we have a large part of our student population who are used to sort of getting what they ask for if you like. And they come from very wealthy families and it's not unusual for students to sort of just go knocking on the VC's door and saying 'I'm unhappy with XYZ'. So I think it's unusual that students would have access to the VC in that way.(...) And he is happy to see students because he is very keen to make sure he knows what's happening in the university. But that can be a negative thing because if they sort of feel they're pressing this big red button and they can call on the VC and then suddenly the VC can come down and make decisions or at least sort of...'*

Most of the respondents volunteered their considerations of why students take on representative roles. The Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching) said: *'I think that the type of students that we get who sit on there are probably similar in approach to their contribution to those committees – there's a level of altruism in a sense that some of those students are doing it*

E/AL/14

E/SLLT/18

because they really believe it's the right thing to do to contribute for the benefit of their other students but I do believe in most instances, just the same as you have in the rest of the student sector, they will be doing it because they believe it will contribute some way towards their student experience and also to do with their own prospects in the world as they come out – they're going to have something on their CV to say how they've contributed to things. It does, it gives them a real advantage. (...) So in the same way that you get students outside doing that, they get it here as well. What you probably don't have though, in the students in this institution that you might get in larger, more traditional universities, is you really don't get the sense of the Union as an entity in a sense that you might get with a Trade Union – do you know what I mean by that? (...) it's not so much about 'we the people', this is about us as student bodies working together as to how we're going to learn to work with each other to make lots of money, you know, that's the type of thing. (...) Slightly different than you know, 'we're here to make radical change for social justice' and stuff like that. I don't think they do it for those reasons. (...) I mean, I do believe that there are always going to be some students who are in there because they're there for social reasons and they believe...but actually when you unpack that, at some level it's a bit like psychologists you know sitting there to help others – in essence, one of the reasons why they're doing it is because through that act they're helping themselves. (...) why do charity workers do it? They're doing it because they feel that it's good to give back but when you say 'what do you mean by give back?' 'Well I'm contributing', 'why are you contributing?' 'Because it makes me feel good' – well therefore they're getting something out of it...' The Student Voice Leader (Student) similarly confirms students' interest in both making a contribution to the institution and their own learning experience, but also to gather skills and develop their CV.

E/SVL/14

The respondents are not uncritical about student engagement (see Quality Assurance section) but are all supportive of engagement nonetheless. The Senior leader (Learning and Teaching) said: '*...one of the things I suppose we are slightly different to everyone else – we worry about getting students involved in everything – whether it's for the right reasons or*

E/SLLT/19

the wrong reasons, I'm not sure. You know you have the thing – the quality assurance brief with the QAA, that's all about student engagement and making sure you're doing it and I wonder sometimes are we doing it just for that? I know that if it wasn't...it's one of the questions I ask people 'if you got rid of your quality system (...) would you still be doing it? Throw it all away, throw your things that you've developed over the last so many years away, start again, who would you ask?' You'd probably go straight to the students. You know, so I think probably yes, we would. But it's because, the reason we would is because we want to know who our student is in a sense of are they a customer, are they a client, are we doing the right thing, because being in the private provider world, although we have stuff going through UCAS and all the rest of it, for us it's very important the word of mouth part of marketing and the thing is we've had three generations of one family go through our institution. (...) And I remember meeting the parent at the last one he said 'yeah, and when theirs are ready they're going to come as well' and that's really nice to see that continuity.'

6. Other findings worth noting

Senior Leader (Learning and Teaching): 'one of the big things I think that is special is the international mix of the university. So we have 89% international students at Regents; only 11% are UK students. (...) So it's very, very heavily skewed and then within that international mix the 11% British are actually the largest single nationality, so the remaining 89% are broken down into very small numbers. So we don't have hundreds of Chinese students or hundreds of students from any country, so there is genuinely a mix. So that's a big thing. It's a big thing in terms of the atmosphere and the campus. It's a big thing in terms of our student body and their expectations, their attitude to learning, their cultural attitude to learning, and therefore it's a big issue when we are thinking about our learning and teaching strategy. And our assessments as well I think also has taken into account their wide cultural backgrounds and pre-university experience that they are bringing.'

This respondent also notes a further specific characteristic of the student population in this institution; 'our students will often be from fairly wealthy backgrounds and we therefore have a sort of medium to long-term policy to be offering more

E/SLLT/20

E/SLLT/21

and more bursaries. In fact, the very long-term aspiration is for [name of institution] to be seen as neutral. So for every full fee paying student we would have one full bursary receiving student. (...) But we're nowhere near that at the moment.'